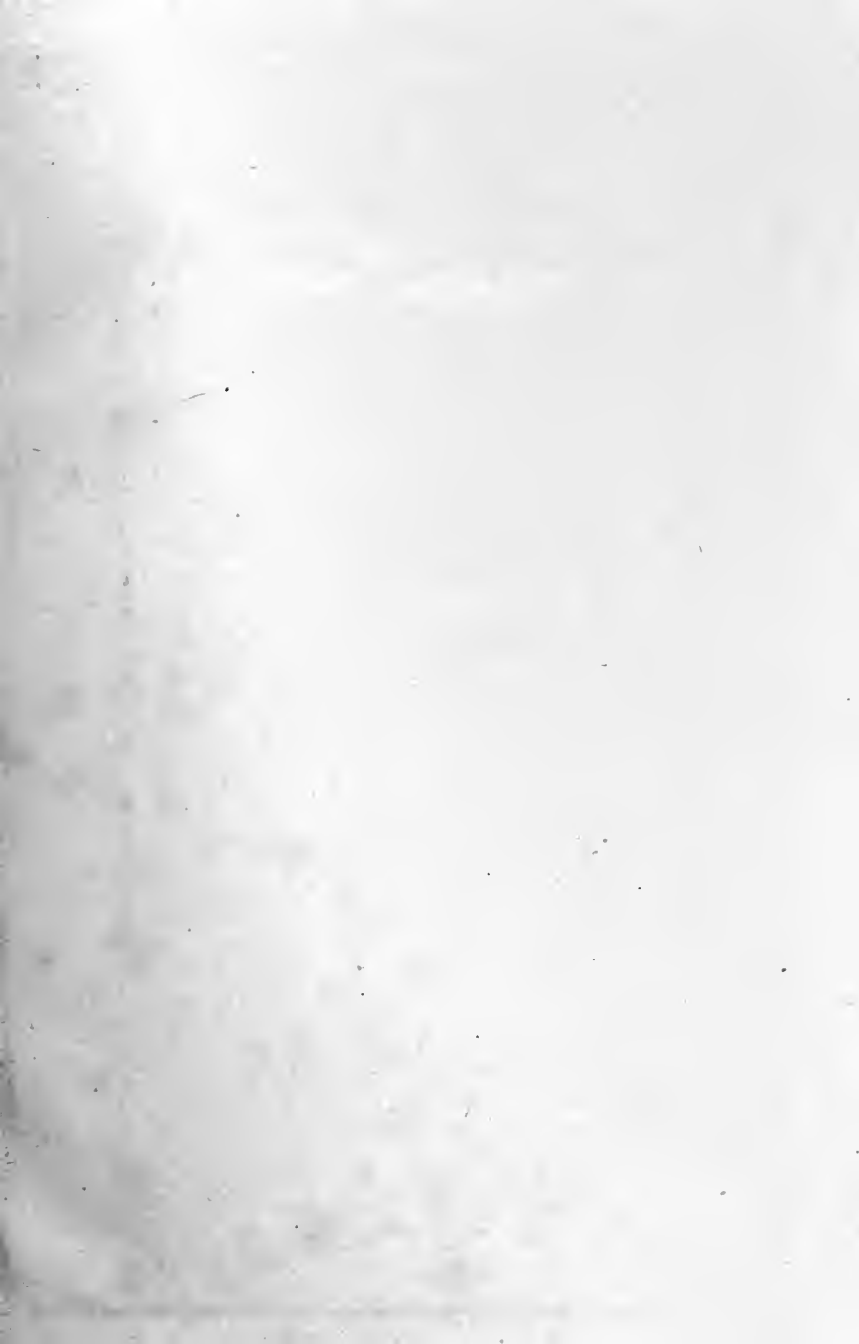


THE HAPPY EMIGRANTS

DALE COLLINS



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THE HAPPY EMIGRANTS

THE STORY:

When Colin's father threw his hat down the hall of the house at Hendon and announced that he had secured passages to Australia, at long last, in a Dutch motor-ship, a high adventure began, which countless people in Britain to-day would wish to share. The doors had swung open; they were off on the wide seas heading for a new life. The tired mother, the father who had served in the navy, their grown son and daughter, the children—all were involved in new and strange experiences. They found romance and colour; and relationships in the narrow world of the *Dordrecht* proved very complex, particularly when the beautiful ballet dancer who joins at Aden proves to be . . .

But that is Colin's tale, and a good one it is. His young eyes saw all the comedy and drama, and sometimes he was puzzled, but he sets it all down in his own arresting, inimitable style, and readers will find him, in very truth a born storyteller.

THE HAPPY EMIGRANTS

By

DALE COLLINS

Author of
Winds of Chance; Ab, Promised Land!;
Ordeal; Bright Vista; Far-off Strands;
Utility Baby; A Sister for Susan,
etc., etc.

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To ESTHER
In thanks for Colin

*All the characters in this book are purely imaginary and
have no relation whatsoever to any living persons.*

CHAPTER I

MY name is Colin Copeland, aged $12\frac{3}{4}$ years, and this is the story of how we became the happy emigrants and our adventures on the voyage to Australia.

"If I were a younger man," my father said, ruffling up his hair which has gone silver at the sides, "I would stick it out here in England. That is, I would if I hadn't you and the kids and Aunt Faith's blessed legacy. As things are, we're going to get out of the lousy country."

"John," my mother warned, "young ears——!"

"Young ears—phooey!" boomed my father "They teach them words like that at kindergarten these days."

"Anyway, it's not that kind of country," my mother went on, looking hurt.

"I know it isn't, girl," my father said very kindly, "but you and I are getting a bit long in the tooth for soldiering on, and the kids are too young to have to yet. If it can be done we're off—O-double-F. We'll beat it. Who wouldn't if they had the chance?"

So that was how it all began.

I saw what my father meant when I told the boys at school. Their eyes stuck out like snails', and they wouldn't believe we were really off to Down-Under—the Antipodes of Australia.

The next thing happened on Thursday the fifteenth.

My mother was finishing the ironing and my father was expected in at any time, but not early because he always had so much to do in town about whether we could get away. We didn't hear his key in the door, perhaps because he wanted it to be a surprise. My father could always do a Surprise if he wanted to. The first thing any of us knew was when his black hat came trundling down the hall on its edge into the dining-room like a poodle.

"Good gracious," said my mother, putting down the iron. "I thought it was a stray dog." Since Nigger was run over we have not had a dog.

My father is very huge and red and cheerful, like the sun. My mother says he is A Man in all senses of the word. She is very fond of him, like us. His voice is cheerful and loud even when he is most sad, for he is not always happy as he makes out. Of course we don't let him know that we know when he is sad, but laugh and play with him, which is what he wants and deserves. He is, as you see, a very nice father though, as mother says, oh such a child! I suppose that is why we all feel so fond of him, including mother. She is very, very fond of children, and it is very nice when a huge man is a child, too.

"Angel of God," said my father, "it's all fixed at last. The passage, the passports, the money and all."

"Oh, John," said my mother, "darling! What a relief!"

"Happy, eh, my old ball-and-chain?" He always has funny names for my mother, and she likes them and so do we. Lots of men call their wives "mother," but that is the children's name. It is much nicer for a man to make up his own names for his wife, so that his children see that she means something different to him.

"Why, goose, goose!" my mother cried out in a choking way, and she forgot the ironing and ran to him and flung her arms out, and he put his arms round her and lifted her off her feet ever so high into the air. "I am so happy I could cry," she said. "I—" She couldn't say any more because he was kissing her.

Of course, I sat quiet, and so did my sister, Ann, and our baby sister, Felicity, even though she is only fourteen months and still teething. We all knew, even Felicity, that this was big and happy news. It had begun to look as if we could not get away from England in spite of Aunt Faith's legacy. There was so much to be arranged that it had begun to look almost impossible. Now it was going to happen, and we would be going away to the Big New Life which my father wanted, because, coming back to England after the war, he found he was fed up, and they could keep Civvy Street so far as he was concerned, and they knew what they could do with Civvy Street.

My father put my mother down on her feet, all out of breath.

He began to sing: "A life on the ocean wave is better than going to sea!"

And he held out his hands to Ann and me, and

before you could say knife the four of us were dancing round the room to his singing, and Felicity was waving Nelly the Elephant, and saying, "Wow-wow! Wow-wow!"—which was the only word she knew and though it meant dog it showed she was happy, too.

My mother had been afraid and could not sleep sometimes because it was such a risk to put all Aunt Faith's legacy and every penny we had into such a madcap venture. She could not be unhappy any more, with everything fixed at last, and dancing with father and us, and even little Felicity waving and cheering "Wow-wow!" as if my father's hat was a black dog, and running round with us.

I would not have been surprised if in the excitement my mother had left the iron on the sheet and burnt a black-edged hole in it, but she had been careful to put the iron on its stand.

This, as I say, was on Thursday the fifteenth when my travels really began, but there was no time to write it all down then. I am writing it down later on the boat, so that my children will know what happened, as father says.

After that there was nothing but excitement and packing and noise. Leave this! Take that! Get out while the going is good!

My father was everywhere, singing his funny songs, because he had been a wartime ordinary seaman. Before the wartime he had done lots of clever things, like acting on the stage and pictures and writing and composing music—but that was long ago.

My mother said he was a great old goose but God would have to be kind to such an Innocent, and He would need to be, or where should we all be? But she knew, now, somehow, it was going to be all right and it was fine to be crazy and burn our boats—even heart in mouth.

And father said: "Your heart is in your eyes. Yes, look at me. In your eyes! And you should have your hair in pig-tails, and a gym suit on and black stockings, for you are only a kid yourself though you pretend to be the all-wise mother of a tribe. You're lovely in your own funny way, you know, and I love you," my father said, but so loud and freely that I didn't feel it was stupid or embarrassing.

All the time Felicity kept saying "Wow-wow!" but my sister Ann, who is only a girl, was moaning we would all be seasick and probably die. She did not intend to be mean or nasty, but she had got used to living in Hendon which was where we had always lived, and girls are not good at adventures and travels and voyages like boys are. Even when I told her about the blackfellows and kangaroos out in Australia it didn't make her happy. She said they would eat us up. Even when I told her, then, that the kangaroos only ate grass and the blackfellows had mostly been exterminated by the early settlers, she did not cheer up, but said she would rather stay in Hendon and did not want to go away from Miss Higgins, who was only her teacher at her girls' school, and silly even to mention.

CHAPTER II

I MUST now go back a bit.

I have so far described only the five of us, and anyone would think that was all our family, which would be wrong. There is also my brother and sister, Michael and Rosemary, who are ever so much older and not our brother and sister really, though just as nice as if they were. Felicity probably cannot tell them from father and mother, since they must look nearly the same size to her being so big.

Michael and Rosemary belong to my father and mother just as much as we do, but they were never my mother's babies but the babies of another mother who was my father's wife ever so long ago before the wartime. We do not have to pretend that she is dead, or anything silly, because my parents are too sensible, but it is as if she were dead because, of course, we younger ones did not ever see her, and I don't think Michael and Rosemary remember what she looked like.

There is no special secret about her. She is not hated, or any fuss made. I suppose she ran off with some other man, and, though I have never worried about what she did because it was no concern of mine, it seems strange to think she could find any man she would want to run off with after having been father's wife. Perhaps he was a different sort

of man whom we wouldn't have loved but she did. She must have been a different sort of woman from my mother.

My brother Michael was in the Air Training Corps, and the National Provincial Bank. My sister Rosemary had a flair for music and did well at school, but there were no openings, so she went into Parker's as a junior assistant.

But all this was before my father threw his hat down the hall. After that, of course, they had to leave the National Provincial and Parker's and come with us to Australia. They were glad when they came home that night and found what had happened, but surprised, too, because I think they'd thought in the end nothing would come of it and everything would go on as before.

No one would ever guess they are not our real brother and sister, only they are very fair, and we are very dark like mother. Their mother must have been very fair, and pretty, too. My sister, Rosemary, is really a lovely girl and not silly like Ann, and Michael used to look a hero in his uniform and is very fine even in ordinary civvies. He doesn't have to wear glasses either, which is nice for him, for glasses are a nuisance and make you get called Four-Eyes and Blinkers.

CHAPTER III

THE name of the boat is the *Dordrecht*, only you must not call her a boat because that means only a lifeboat like she carried on her davits. She isn't a steamship, but a motor vessel, with engines like a motor car, so that there is no smoke from the funnel or dirt or sparks, and everything is very new and modern and spick-and-span.

We are all quite in love with her. I shall know everything about her before long as I am getting a great deal of information and making notes. As all this is very technical, and will only appeal to some people, I think I shall put it into a special Appendix at the back, like a real book, and refer the reader who is interested to that. I will put in the Appendix all about her speed and horsepower and tonnage and measurements, for those who want to know about ships and how big they are, etc. That is, of course, if I have time.

"We are going to make our exit in style," my father said. "A car all the way to the docks."

"Isn't that rather extravagant?" asked my mother, but smiling, because she was a woman and liked to be treated with chivalry. "We are not millionaires yet, you know, John."

"As good as, my small black hen," he said,

laughing at her. "And am I the captain now or only still a temporary acting ordinary seaman?"

"I guess you're the big boss," my mother said.

"What kind of a gangster's moll is this I've married?" my father asked, and Michael and Rosemary and I laughed because of the funny way he said such a funny thing.

My mother looked shocked, but very fond of him. He was so big and silly and wise.

Because it was wise of him to have the car like that. When it came to leaving Hendon and the house we had always lived in—or I suppose we had—it was raining and sad. Of course we were all excited and in a state, but it hurt like having a tooth out. Even though we were so busy, you couldn't help feeling we were going away from everything. Yet at the same time you couldn't realize it properly in all the rush, with the car at the door ticking away pounds, as father said.

In the end there was no time for being sad or thinking or anything really, except just to rush out through the rain into the car, and slam the door. While we were sorting out, and saying had we forgotten anything, and Oh Goodness!—the car just sailed away with us into the night, and when next we saw a thing it was not Hendon at all but new streets, strange and wet and shining in the rain and lamp-light, so that there was nothing to cry about. When Felicity waved to the big red buses, and said "Wow-wow!" we could all laugh and be happy. She was such a silly little baby to think a great huge bus was just a dog.

Lots of chatter from all of us as we went in such style through the lights of the West End and down on through the mysterious East End. Rosemary kept saying: "I wish the girls at Parker's could see me now." We were all saying things like that. Father was, he said, as full of beer and bonhomie as a drunken matlow. Only my mother and Ann were quiet. I suppose Ann was worrying about the schoolteacher, and my mother, of course, would be sad leaving Hendon and everything and everyone there and going out to the Antipodes of Australia. Apart from being married to my father she was not really of the adventurous kind, but more of a housewife and one who would have stayed put, I think. Only she was married to my father and would do whatever he wanted.

Although he was so jolly with all the rest of us, he didn't try to be jolly with her. He held her quietly in his big right arm, and she had Felicity on her lap, asleep now in her shawl, and she just sat with a bit of a smile, not crying at all, and that was really braver of her and more comfortable for us than if she had tried to pretend. I think that women, though they aren't brave and gallant like men, are really very brave and gallant in their own especial way.

So we went through the dock gates, where there were policemen in shining capes like seals at the zoo, and went bumping along and then bumped on boards, and there was the motor vessel *Dordrecht*, or the boat as I thought of her then.

It was a bit frightening.

The night was as black as black, but there were

huge lights hanging up in the sky. They sent down kind of golden tents. Through these tents ran the rain, like hundreds and hundreds of moving telegraph wires. The motor vessel and the lights were so big that the men moving about looked like little black beetles. There was a smell of sour water, and the side of the motor vessel went up almost as if it were a wall to the sky. Rattling, clanging noises were everywhere. So black yet bright and strange, like a dream.

"Give me the youngest unmarried daughter," my father said, "and all follow me lively, or we'll be drowned before we start."

The car was paid for, and all our luggage was aboard, so we had nothing to do but run to the gangway through the silver rain and up it into the ship. There was no chance to think that now we were really leaving England. We skurried along like hens. It was all so exciting that everything went blurred, and the next I remember we were in our cabin which was quiet and bright and snug—a lovely tiny room, not a room at all somehow, but the inside of a varnished white box you could play in.

We were all in the one cabin, though we were to have two, one for the ladies and one for the men, and we stood there out of breath and staring. My mother had been a bit afraid when she heard we were going to travel in a cargo-boat that carried some passengers. She had not expected anything so lovely and warm as the motor vessel. With a plomp she sat down on the bed as if she was suddenly tired, but she looked about with shiny eyes.

"Oh, John," she said, "it's perfect! I wish we could live on and on on this boat."

"Trust the old matlow to know the ropes, my pretty sweeting," said my father, beaming and very pleased with himself.

Then my mother, who had not cried at all, or at least not in front of anyone, burst out crying. But that was all right. She had only burst out crying because she was happy, and all the business of packing and leaving was over, and now she only had to sit down with us and go away in the fine grand motor vessel.

"This calls for a drink," said my father, and he strode over and pushed a button in the wall.

"Heavens, John," said my mother, smiling though the tears were silver on her cheeks, "I am going to be waited on!"

Of course she had never been waited on before, but always very busy.

"Hand and foot, my princess," said my father, and he bent down from away up above and kissed her on her hair. "Well, kids," he said, "what do you think?—what do you know?"

He didn't expect us to answer. He was clever and knew we didn't have enough words to tell him, not even Rosemary who was quite grown-up and had worked at Parker's away back there outside the ship. So far away Parker's seemed and Hendon and all the rest now that we were really on board the *Dordrecht*.

CHAPTER IV

THE Dutch are very clean people, though you should call them Hollanders, which is what they prefer.

They all look alike and pink and fresh, just as if they had come out of a steaming hot bath. They are very round people. Their heads and bodies and eyes are so round that it is as if somebody had been drawing circles and then made them into men.

But they are nice people and kind, and smile a lot and have deep laughs. Their round eyes are even more blue than Rosemary's.

The chief engineer has a little boy named Yackie. He talks about him a lot and brings Yackie into everything. He says I remind him of Yackie, though I am not like Yackie, so he is going to take me down and show me the engines.

She has not an ordinary funnel but a streamlined one which starts in a point and finishes in a point. It looks like a kind of squeezed oval, I should say, and, as it is yellow with black bands on it, also reminds one of a wasp.

The food is very good but funny. You have huge plates of pea-soup with pork in it for lunch, and cold sausage in slices for breakfast. There are two long tables in the saloon, and we all sit at one with the chief engineer and the second officer. The

other passengers are at the other, with the Captain and the first officer. This is a very good arrangement as we are a family party. The chief engineer says it is like being at home in Rotterdam and he feels that Yackie is there with us. We like to hear him talk about Yackie in his funny English, and my mother asks him questions to lead him on so he likes her and he likes us all. The second officer is young but round and pink like the others with the same sandy hair and eyelashes. He does not say a great deal, but eats a lot, and keeps looking at Rosemary on the sly as if he could never see enough of her if he dared.

As the sea is very calm and the food is so funny we all eat well but we don't feel too full because it seems to shake down.

Next day when we woke up we took it in turn to have a bath in the bathroom, which is between our two cabins. My father says this is a great luxury which you wouldn't get in the *Queen Mary* unless you were a millionaire or the King or someone like that.

And when we went up on deck there was no land at all but only the sea which was calm and grey. The rain made millions of little holes in it. The sea is not much to look at after the first surprise of there being only it and no land, but there was plenty to occupy us in looking about the ship and having breakfast. For breakfast there was not only the slices of sausage, but also slices of very pink ham and radishes and so on which you would expect at high tea. It made a great change.

Presently, when I was going about the ship finding my way and discovering all about it, a passenger came up to me and began to talk. He was a tall man who had been a soldier as you could tell by the erect way he held himself, and his moustache. He had a brown, hard face, and his eyes were brown, but they were soft though at times they did not seem to see you but something else far away.

"Hullo, young man," he began. "What's your name?"

"Copeland, sir," I told him. "Colin Copeland."

"That's a fine name," he said. "And what is your sister's name?"

"I have got three sisters, sir," said I, pulling his leg though he did not know it. It was Rosemary he meant from the off-hand way he spoke.

"And very nice, too," he said. "I meant—ah—the oldest one."

"That's Rosemary," said I.

"That's a pretty name, too," he said. "You Copelands seem to pick good names. Sun's getting towards the yard-arm. Do you like ginger-pop, Colin?"

"Oh yes, sir," said I, keeping a straight face though I knew why he was giving me ginger-pop.

So he went away and came back with a glass, but he said they had no gingerpop and this lemonade was the best he could do.

It was a bit sticky really, but I said it was nice and thanked him, and he said he would have to be off now but one of these days he would have to

tell me some yarns about the Commandos and would I like that.

"Yes, indeed, sir," I said. "Were you in them?"

"Think nothing of it," he answered airily, but smiling nicely, and I still kept a straight face though I knew he had told me because he wanted me to tell Rosemary and get her interested in him.

I did so. He seems a fine man and a good soldier to judge by his looks, and he seems rich, too. I think he will marry Rosemary, and that will be nice if he is rich, for she didn't meet many worthwhile men in Hendon and at Parker's. Father often said so. So long as he is rich it will be nice if he marries her, but if he is poor I hope not, because father has more than he can do keeping his starving tribe, which is what he calls us, though we don't starve really but had good food at home though not the same as we get now on the motor vessel.

My mother was sitting on the top deck which has glass sides that can be let down in bad weather. My father says that is a refinement even he had never expected but you would only expect to find in big liners. She was lying back in a long chair with a rug round her, and a pillow behind her head, and a closed book on her lap and just gazing out into the sky with a kind of peaceful look. It was funny to see my mother sitting down and so peacefully in broad daylight, with no housework to do or anything.

A steward with bright brass buttons came up and bowed politely to her and offered her a cup of beef-tea though breakfast wasn't so very long ago, but,

of course, I had had the lemonade from the Commando.

She gave him her smile which people love to get because it is gentle and makes you warm.

"I could purr like a stroked kitten," she told him.

He did not understand, being a Dutchman or Hollander.

"Please?" he said, in puzzled question.

"I am happy," said my mother, still smiling at the pink-faced, round young man who was so kind and attentive.

"Then that is goodt," he said delighted, and beaming like the Cheshire Cat. "Yes, that is goodt. Please to have another cup because he is goodt."

So my mother had another cup, mostly to please him I think, for she isn't a great eater, but perhaps not, because, as she says, it is vastly different when you don't have to cook the stuff yourself and don't even know what's coming.

Later on Ann slipped on a ladder and cut her knee, but it wasn't really as bad as she made out. She says the ship has a funny smell, but that is only the smell of the ship like any ship would have.

Instead of clocks striking they ring a bell up on the bridge. The bell has a pleasant sound, not like a school bell or church bell. It is a kind of golden sound.

So we go sailing happily along towards the Antipodes of Australia.

CHAPTER V

IT is funny, but the most beautiful lady passenger aboard the M.V. *Dordrecht* has a boy's name and looks like a boy, though you know she is a lady all the time.

Her name is Stevie Markham which is a boy's name, and somehow you don't put anything in front of it like Miss or Mrs. Indeed, I do not know myself whether she is a Miss or a Mrs. She is just somehow Stevie Markham. She wears grey flannel bags, but lots of ladies do that nowadays. They did at Hendon but there they were silly, because their bottoms were huge and they waddled along wagging them. But Stevie Markham is not like that at all. She is like a boy, only she is a girl too. She has black hair cut short and smooth like a boy's, and is very little and neat, like the saying that good goods are put up in small parcels. She is very smooth, her skin and all. Her eyes are black and her ears and hands and feet are tiny.

My brother Michael has it badly about her and I cannot blame him. If I were in a motor vessel and his age I would follow her about, too, and play deck tennis with her and gaze across from our table. He looks at her at meals rather like the second officer looks at Rosemary, only he doesn't know anyone else is noticing and gazes and gazes.

My mother likes most people, but she doesn't like Stevie Markham, which is funny and a pity. I think what is in her mind is that Michael has never seen any girl like Stevie Markham before, and is too attracted—as of course he is.

My mother said: "But, John, the woman's old enough to be his mother, and I'd hate to guess what she doesn't know."

"Chook, chook," my father answered. "Come here, chicken! Do the boy good. He can't stay a bank clerk all his life meeting bank clerkesses. Great kid, Stevie. Wish I'd had half his luck at his age. Just what the doctor ordered."

"Oh, John," my mother said, "you are incorrigible. A little cheap pocket vamp like that and our son!" Of course, he was not my mother's son, but she always thought of him like that.

My father said: "Poor dear little black hen! You'd love to keep them under your wing for ever and a day, wouldn't you?—but it can't be done, my lamb. Even if he gets a bit bruised, Stevie won't hurt him really. I'd rather it was Stevie than a games mistress from Roedean."

"Oh, John," my mother cried out. "Oh, John, sometimes I could shake you. I only wish it was a games mistress."

"That's why you're a goose," my father laughed. "If she was a games mistress it would all be deadly serious and earnest and before we knew where we were they would be engaged, and our son Michael has nothing in the wide world except my blessing and his good looks and lots of my charm. So

Stevie will do him a lot of good before she ditches him for something more practical."

"Oh, John, John," my mother cried out again, "she will hurt him, I'm sure. He is a good boy, and just a sitting shot for a woman of the world like that."

"Cluck, cluck," said my father, who wouldn't be serious at all. "Even if she shoots him she won't want to put him in her bag, and that's all that matters. If I'd known there was a Stevie about and I could have afforded it, I'd have hired her to come along. Whoops, dearie, my little old black hen, I wish I were Michael all ready to have my heart broken!"

"You are a dirty old rooster yourself," said my mother, but she had to laugh at my father, and her mind was easier for him being such a Man in every sense of the word, which was why we all loved him.

"Anyway," my father said finally, "if you can trust the word of an acting temporary seaman, Michael and some others will have plenty to occupy them for a while, because we're getting down into the Bay and unless I am a landlubber it's going to blow all hades and what-have-you!"

As my father said, that night it stopped being calm, and the motor vessel started to bounce and throw herself about in a manner I could not describe. When you read about rough weather at sea you think of waves such as you watch from the beach at Eastbourne, but real waves at sea are quite another matter. They make the ship groan and toss though she is so big. They stand her on end as if she were a

pullet's egg. They do just as they like with her and everything slides about and things swing on hooks, to and fro, to and fro, and the water comes splashing right across the deck against the porthole, and the door of a cupboard comes open and swings to and fro, and everything goes round.

You start to yawn and you sweat, though you're not cold. I wasn't sick for a long time, because I have always wanted to go to sea and have voyages like my father, who was in the navy during the war-time, but presently it was no good any more, and I was sick. This is the best thing to do. Once it is Up you feel lighter, and you can lie in your warm bunk and shut your eyes and not think of the ham or the pea soup, but just lie there with the portholes shut and your eyes closed, and hear all the awful noise. You know the ship will not sink and some day you will get your sea-legs and be a sailor, or otherwise no one could ever be a sailor to make a living.

It was warm in the bunk, and I knew what my father meant about Stevie and my brother Michael, for no one could be interested in anyone when the sea is really rough and the motor vessel is going pound-pound-pound! bang-bang-bang! into the ocean.

It is funny that you are not afraid. Only so miserable and cold and hot, but when once it is Up there is quite a long time when you snuggle down and sleep and forget everything, and the warmth comes stealing into you so kind and welcome.

I shall not write any more about being seasick but pass on to other things.

CHAPTER VI

THIS is all about Gibraltar and what happened to us there.

Gibraltar is a big rock sticking out into the Mediterranean. It is the shape of a lion, which is only right, because as my father said, it is as British as beer, and my mother said it was so proud and part of England that it really gave her a catch in the throat when she saw it. There are many monkeys on Gibraltar, and the legend is that when the last monkey dies the British will go, so there will always be monkeys on Gibraltar.

There were many ships of the British Fleet in Gibraltar and with my father's help I made a list of them, but, as this is very interesting but another technical matter, I shall put the list and all the details in another special Appendix to be called Appendix B to distinguish it, to which the reader is referred if he is interested. I think I shall also make another Appendix C of all the names of the ordinary ships we see as we go along and in ports. This would be of interest to anyone interested in such things, but would interfere with the story of My Voyage if I started to break off to mention them. But it looks as if I may be too busy.

But to get back to Gibraltar.

"My, my, this is a bit of luck, my chick—or is

it?" my father said, "because in the ordinary way a ship like this would not call here. But don't think I bribed them, angel, for I didn't. It's only just they have some special cargo for My Lords. Still, it remains a bit of luck—or is it?—because as sure as God made little apples I shall get tight as a drum this day, what with meeting old shipmates and so on."

My father was in the navy during the wartime, and Gibraltar is a great place for the Navy. Not as great as Pompey, which is Portsmouth, but nearly.

Now anyone outside would have thought that my mother who does not drink at all would be terribly upset when my father said this, but she only smiled a curly smile.

"So long as you don't get run over or run in," she smiled, "I suppose I must let you sow your wild oats. You men," my mother went on, "you funny, dear, poor creatures!"

"That's me all over, Mabel," said my father, though Mabel is not my mother's name. "You've hit the nail bang on the head as usual. First prize a coconut! So I shall desert you on the dock and make the odd spot of debauch, and you can show the kids the shops and the gardens, and have a decent womanly good time. There are pretty things in the shops, and, if you have anything to spare, buy me a bottle of gin for my hangover. It's dirt cheap. I may not fancy Hollands to-morrow a.m."

"You will fancy a big dose of Epsom's," said my mother.

It may seem odd that she did not lecture him, or

try to restrain him or anything, but my mother knows my father and knows a few drinks do him no harm. They make him sing, or cry when he comes in if there is something sad on the radio like Deanna Durbin singing *Ave Maria*, but he is really just himself only bigger and more so. Everyone knows drink is a terrible thing, and I am never going to touch it myself, but with my father it is different, because he takes it in his stride.

So we all went down the long, springy ladder into the motor-boat, and the Commando helped Rosemary and Michael helped Stevie Markham, and when we were ashore they went away and we didn't see them until it was time to be back. The first officer looked after my mother himself. He wanted to carry Felicity, but my mother would not let him, though she admitted he was less likely to slip than she was but that was different. So we all went ashore, and went up stone steps and there we were in Gibraltar, though there were no monkeys down there in the town.

"Give a drunken sailor a kiss, lass," my father said, and my mother gave it to him, and then, laughing gave him a bit of a push so away he went, and before he was out of sight he had met a group of bluejackets and was shaking hands all round. You could hear his laugh loud and strong and happy.

"Bless him," said my mother in her fond way, and we all got into a little carriage with two little ponies like big rats, and drove about.

There are a great many sailors and marines and soldiers all walking up and down in Gibraltar, which

seems to have only one street where there are lots of little shops with kimonos, gin, whisky, etc., etc., for sale. All the other people have very dark skins, and some are quite black like niggers. Some wore red fezzes and other queer clothes. My mother went in and bought a bottle of gin for my father for to-morrow, and in the very next shop outside there was a fine red kimono with a gold dragon on it.

I do not often tell my mother what to buy, but Gibraltar is an exciting place like Hampstead Heath on a Bank Holiday, so I made her come and see the kimono.

"Please buy it, mother," I begged, "for you would look swell in it."

"Would I, son?" said my mother, and she looked as if she wanted to cry. Then she said: "I believe you are right, Colin. I believe I would look swell in it."

"Father would think so," I said, knowing that would settle it.

"How much is this?" my mother asked the shop-keeper who looked brown and sharp like a hawk in the zoo.

"To you, lady, I make special price," he said. "To you—fifty English bobs."

"That is a lot of money," said my mother, which wasn't really true for you would never get such a kimono in England at five times the money.

She turned as if to go away.

"Thirty-five English bobs," spoke up the shop-keeper, and when my mother still seemed to be going away he said: "I like your liddle babee, lady."

To you I make special price and this is last price. To you, lady, one English pound."

So my mother bought it with the dragon and all, and then she wondered if it wasn't a bit gaudy, but Ann and I told her it was the loveliest thing she had ever had and we were crazy about it, and so would be father.

She was happy then, and we had ice-cream and drinks in a café sticking right out on to the pavement, and watched the donkeys and things go by, and there were monkeys and very bright green trees in the garden. It was a hot white town very full of men.

We only had three hours in Gibraltar, and they went by all too soon, and we were back at the steps and the launch was waiting with all the people we knew in it, including my brother and sister. They all had parcels on their laps, and Rosemary had a great huge bunch of flowers which were golden as her hair, and the Commando soldier gave me a big wink and jerked his head at them so that I knew he had given them to her and he thought she was golden like them. So did I.

"Oh, dear," my mother said, "I mustn't become a fusspot, but I do hope your father is not going to miss the boat and have us all stranded here and Felicity missing her sleep."

But just at that moment my father came down the street with a bluejacket on either side of him and a petty officer on the flank. He was as tight as a drum, as he had said, but my mother did not mind that at all, for he had been in the navy in wartime

and this was a port, and now after all we wouldn't keep the motor vessel waiting, and so everything was all right.

My father was singing. He has a lovely big voice. He was singing: "From the rock of Gibraltar take a flying kick at Malta and we'll have another drink before the boat shoves off!"

"You won't, you know," said the petty officer, giving my mother a nice salute, "but, man, when I've done my time I'm going to enjoy the beach as much as you do, and that'll suit me right down to the ground." He turned to my mother. "Here's your handful, mam," he said. "Glad to see you're the right sort and not cross with him. Take him away before he wrecks the Rock. Best respects, mam, and a nice voyage."

"Thank you for all your kindness," my mother said. "Trust the navy!——" and she gave them her best smile.

"Lovely time," said my father. "Lovely, lovely! They were going to put me in the cooler, but hadn't the heart when I sobbed out about my wife and poor wee bairns. There was an Admiral. You never saw so much gold lace and ribbons in your life. Always wanted to. Never had the chance before. Slapped him on the back and said, 'What cheer, me old cuckoo?' Would have got away with it, too, but I think he was a bit deaf and thought I said 'Cuckold.' Didn't seem so happy about that. Uneasy lies the head that wears gold leaves. Come, my lover and my tribe. The carriage waits."

And he jumped down into the boat as though he had never had a drink in his life, and helped my mother and us. The patrol in their canvas gaiters and belts stood grinning from ear to ear, and sorry to see him go. Before you could say knife he had us all singing his song about Gibraltar and Malta, and the motor-boat went bounding and dancing out across the little blue waves under the wide blue sky back to the *Dordrecht*.

So that is how my father got tight as a drum at Gibraltar, and why we don't whisper about Drink in our family, though I shall never touch it as it tastes horrid.

CHAPTER VII

IT is very romantic sailing along the Mediterranean in a motor vessel. By day the sun is bright but it is not too hot, and sky and sea are brightly blue. The little waves skip along, not as it was in the Bay of Biscay where I was seasick but need not mention that again. In the Mediterranean one feels at last one has got away from the English climate, and that is a very pleasant feeling, particularly if you have always lived there. At night it is even more romantic, for lots and lots of very big bright stars come out which seem more golden and alive than they did in England, for of course it is not like living in London because there are no clouds and no smoke not even from the funnel in a motor vessel.

Yes, by night it is very romantic indeed. Not being a liner but only a cargo-boat most of the decks are dark, and you can only guess them, but up where we live is a kind of little bright castle of light. Down below the sea goes swishing out from the side in a white fan, and the night is so black that the *Dordrecht* seems to go along in a mist of her own light as if she was a ghost ship such as the *Flying Dutchman*. It is funny to think of the *Flying Dutchman* when you are really aboard a Dutch ship.

The bar steward is round like all Hollanders, but much smaller; and he pops about always very busy

and smiling. It is he who gives my mother her beef-tea in the morning when she is sitting doing nothing, just resting. That is nice for her. At night he is glad to play us music on the gramophone. The gramophone is in the bar, and that is where he works it, but there is a relay system out to the upper deck, which is a refinement, my father says, you would never expect.

Then, when the steward is popping about like a busy squirrel and serving drinks and playing us the gramophone, we have dancing on the upper deck with the ship not rocking but throbbing along and trembling as if she was alive. She goes at seventeen knots because she was built for the wool trade which has to be fast, not like some other cargoes where it doesn't matter. The motor vessel going along like this, with the throb in her and the night and the stars quiet all about, makes it very romantic for the dancing, as I can see even though I do not dance myself but sit and talk with the Captain and the chief engineer and my mother and father and others.

There are really only two dancing ladies aboard, though there is also a lady missionary, who is quite young and, I suppose, nice, and also a fat woman. But my sister Rosemary and Stevie are really the only two whom you could call real dancing ladies. Both of them are lovely to watch, and it is nice to see the one so fair and golden like the lights, and the other so smooth and dark like the sky and the sea. These two dance every dance and everyone wants to dance with them, but mostly they dance with the Commando and my brother Michael.

As I have already described the others at some length, I must now sketch in the Commando whom I have only described as buying me a lemonade, but there is more to him than that.

I am glad he is going to marry Rosemary, though she is so lovely she might marry almost anyone, but he is certainly better than anyone she met in Hendon or Parker's.

"Don't you think, John," my mother said to my father, "the child is getting a bit too infatuated?"

"Oh, I don't know," my father replied. "He's a fascinating bounder and certainly has a line. I may have to polish up my six-shooter and put a bullet in his abdomen before it's all over, but I shouldn't think so. Rosemary has her head screwed on the right way, though you'd never think so to look at her, but, when you've lived as long as I have, you come to realize that beauties don't have to be dumb when it comes to the realities—and by realities I don't mean mathematics."

"John, it's a good thing you married me," said my mother, "for you would drive any sane woman crazy!"

"No sane woman would have married me anyway, my peach," said my father, "but I am not so mad that I don't know a hawk from a hacksaw, if that is right. Our gallant fellow is a fortune hunter I should think. Rosemary looks like a million dollars. Even her papa knows that. When things get difficult I shall explain our financial position, my love, and that will be that. He is not so base as to put sex before security. He doesn't know, as I do,

that Mrs. Urquhart is worth a cool two hundred thousand."

"But how do you discover such things, you gossip?" my mother cried out. "You, who never speak to anyone but us?"

"That's all you know," my father said. "Mark my words, old Truepenny, this Menace is a bungler or he would have known about Mrs. U. long before me, who has only a kind of hopeless yearning in that direction."

My mother laughed at my father's joke, for Mrs. Urquhart was the fat lady who was not a dancer at all and just seemed to sit and talk to the Captain or the missionary lady who knitted.

The only reason I put the above conversation down is to show how wrong even a father can be when he is making what are called Snap Judgments.

For the Commando, who is called Colonel Nigel St. John Bouverie, is a very fine man indeed, and though, of course, my father was only talking in his own funny way, no one would ever want to shoot Col. Bouverie in the abdomen, though the Germans tried a lot of times to shoot him but didn't. That was in the wartime, and in our talks he has told me lots of things about his experiences which show he is a very fine soldier as I knew at once. He has told me about how he used to black his face and strangle sentries with his shoe-laces, for he wore canvas sneakers—etc., etc.—but he would not wish me to write down his adventures because he is a modest man, like all gallant soldiers, and only mentioned them to me because he wanted me to tell

Rosemary. I could understand him wanting me to do that, and was glad enough to do so, because he wouldn't want to brag to Rosemary himself, but if her kid brother told her, then that was different. It shows, I think, that he is indeed an officer and a gentleman.

As for him being a fortune hunter, I am surprised at my father saying such a thing, but my father himself had a saying which explains much. Sometimes back at home in Hendon he would forget to put out the cat or stoke the Ideal boiler, and then he would say: "Well, my apple blossom, at moments even Jove nods!" And my mother couldn't be cross with him somehow, then. But that in a more important way was what has happened with my father and Col. Bouverie. Jove has nodded, and I must say it in justice to my friend who is a gallant soldier and one day will be my brother-in-law, for love will find a way, particularly when the lover is as beautiful as my sister, Rosemary.

Besides, Col. Bouverie mentioned to me just in casual talk that he flew his own aeroplane at home, and thought a Rolls or a Bentley were the only cars worth driving and had never driven anything else.

Do fortune hunters fly aeroplanes and drive Rolls and Bentleys? I should have thought not.

So I was glad to see Rosemary dancing with Col. Bouverie and looking up smiling into his face, for he was the taller as a soldier should be taller than a girl.

The second officer who sits at our table used to screw up his courage and go and bow and ask for the

honour for a dance, and of course Rosemary used to dance with him too, but he was so delighted that he didn't dance very well anyway, no matter how much he enjoyed it. Or not as well as my friend, Col. Bouverie.

I am sorry about the second officer, who is a good second officer I should say, but he has no real chance. How could he? And anyway, a second officer in a Dutch motor vessel could never support Rosemary, besides being away at sea so much. My sister Rosemary is one who deserves all the rich things of life like fur coats and orchids. She could not get them when she was working at Parker's, but now that we are travelling and she is meeting worthwhile men, that is another kettle of fish.

And it is nice to see my brother Michael and Stevie dance together on these romantic nights in the Mediterranean. She is like the night, and very different from anybody Michael would have met in the National Provincial. He is really more handsome than Col. Bouverie, if the truth was told, though of course Rosemary would never think that. At home in Hendon, Michael used to practise steps in his bedroom before he went out to a dance, but Stevie doesn't make him do any steps and they just go round the bit of deck as if the wood beneath their feet wasn't there but only air. It must be nice to do, and is nice to watch. If I say it makes me feel I wish I could dance, it will explain what I mean.

There is another man who manages to get a dance with Stevie but only now and then, and she doesn't like dancing with him, for often they stop and go in

and sit up at the bar, which is a semi-circle in modern style—a refinement you would not expect to find in the *Dordrecht* but only in the *Queen Mary* or *Queen Elizabeth*.

This other man is a wool buyer. He does not buy wool for knitting, but wool from the merino sheep of Australia before it is made into knitting wool. His name is Joshua Bannister and he is like a cinnamon teddy bear. His talk is funny, like comedians on the B.B.C. He says "Choom" and "Ay by Goom," but I think he puts it on a bit because he is very proud of coming from Bradford, but we come from London and that is a bigger and better place after all, so perhaps he only puts it on.

He drinks a lot.

One night he came out with a glass of wine in each hand, and he walked to the rail. We all watched, surprised.

"That's for her and that's for him," he said, threw both the glasses into the sea, and burst out crying.

It was embarrassing, but he went straight off to bed and we didn't see him for two days, when he came up to dinner as if nothing had happened.

I have made him out to seem a strange man, but there is something most likeable about him though I don't know what. He is jolly when he is sad, like my father, only he is not so clever at it.

"A good cove that, a good cove," my father said once to my mother. "A pity some bitch should have made a mess of him. You don't do his job, with hundreds of thousands depending on a nod, unless you know your onions."

So this was the way there was dancing on deck while we went through the Mediterranean, but, before it seemed any time since dinner, four bells would be made up on the bridge, which is the proper term for ringing the time in a motor vessel.

"Colin," my mother would say. "Time for bed."

And the chief engineer would say: "My Yackie has been in bed these hours, yes"—because he liked to mention Yackie whenever he could.

So I would kiss my mother good-night and go down to the cabin and clean my teeth and go to bed, leaving them up there dancing and talking. Down below in the little white cabin the throb-throb was stronger, and it made you sleepy and glad to be in your bunk. When my father and Michael came in, even at different times, it did not matter because they were shadows going about and I was asleep with the throb-throb of the *Dordrecht* patting me deeper asleep.

It is nice at sea. One eats well and plays well and sleeps well, and there is no smoke or disturbance, and the weather is fine by day and by night, but perhaps it is nicer at night when the other ships go by. They look like little bright shop windows, only you know they are whole towns going along, like the *Dordrecht*, though they look small as I suppose we do to them.

CHAPTER VIII

THE chief engineer, as I think I have said, is a nice man. He took me down to see the engines, and as this is a motor vessel they are all very clean and fine and almost quiet, but of course there is a lot of humming, and things going to and fro, but there are no stokers like you see at the pictures, and it is really surprising that all these things just working can send such a big motor vessel as the *Dordrecht* along all the way to the Antipodes of Australia without ever stopping except at ports when the chief engineer pulls down a handle on the wall.

There is a long tunnel that runs down to the end of the ship which makes you think of the White Rabbit and Alice. In this tunnel is a long pole or shaft, which is bright as silver and keeps turning and turning. On the end there is the screw which sends us along. I should add there are two of these. The chief engineer can touch them as they spin round so smoothly—the shafts, I mean, not the screws—but it is better not for anyone else as it is a knack.

It was all very interesting but I shall put the details in Appendix D, to which those readers who are interested are referred for details about h.p. and other technical details which otherwise would interfere with the story of My Voyage. Or perhaps I should say I hope I shall.

Then he took me up to his own cabin and gave me chocolate.

"See," said the chief engineer, "there is now a present for you if you can but have him."

And on the wall of his cabin a stuffed swallow was pinned. I said I could not take it from him because it was too pretty there.

"But take him," the chief engineer said, chuckling.

And when I put up my hand the swallow came to life and flew out through the door and away.

"Yust my liddle yoke," the chief engineer said, "but no harm. He has rested, and now has gone flying on his journey. So our ship is some use in the world and helps those so liddle birds."

He is a very kind man, though I was scared when the bird came alive and flew away.

"You are a so lucky, liddle boy Col-in," the chief engineer said. "You have nice father and mother, nice family."

"Yes, Chief," I said.

"And luckiest of all, Col-in," said he, "to have your little sister, Ann."

Now this was a great surprise, for Ann is very ordinary and just a schoolgirl and I don't pay much attention to her.

"Yes, Chief," I said, but only politely.

"You do not know, liddle boy," he said. "You do not understand. I am a great family man and would have sisters and brothers for my liddle Yackie. Many, many—but no! That is not. There it is. The pity."

He looked sad and far away and didn't smile or chuckle any more, and at first I wanted to tell him his Yackie would have brothers and sisters, but then I knew Yackie wouldn't, and it was no good saying anything at all. I sat quiet, and he opened a drawer and gave me a banana, which we couldn't get in the wartime, and he forgot about Ann and told me about when he was a boy and went round the Horn in a sailing ship. He showed me a coloured picture of Yackie, who had on a funny sailor suit with a sailor hat with ribbons at the back. It was strange to see a Hollander so small.

And so we came to Malta which is another naval port.

"Ooo, la-la!" my mother said, laughing.

But my father said: "Have no fear, my flower of May. In the twinkling of an eye I have made a decision which will take a weight off your mind. Yonder is a cruiser of His Britannic Majesty's Royal Australian Navy. You, Colin, will note she flies a Jack and on a blue ground is the Southern Cross under which, God help us, we go to dwell. I shall get me a boat and be ferried across and see if the matlows have any low-down to give me on dear old Aussie. This will give everybody pleasure, and you will know, my own, that the worst I can do is fall into the drink, or in shoregoing parlance, the harbour."

My mother said: "John, it's not a bad idea. There is a lot we want to find out. And at least you won't be arrested."

"Always at your service, mam," my father said,

and he called for a little rowing-boat and was rowed away, looking very mischievous.

We all went ashore for a little while, but Malta is a dusty and very old place. It is not an ordinarily dusty place, but as if people have been living there so long that their bones blow about. It makes you sneeze and feel dusty, and one's eyes smart. The people here worship the Pope, and there are many priests in black with hats like coal shovels. In the churches there are many idols dressed up in bright clothes and jewels. It is fun in the churches, like going to a fair. I am not very religious, I am afraid, and neither is Ann, but we found it great fun in the pretty churches. There were also many small candles and the smell of incense was nice.

There was a church with a big dome, bigger I should say than St. Paul's. I could not help wondering what would have happened if a bomb had come through it in the wartime, but it didn't. In the wartime there was a lot of bombing of Malta.

We were glad enough to get back to the clean ship, though I suppose Malta is a very historic place. St. Paul landed there after whom St. Paul's mentioned above is named.

But I didn't like Malta much.

Naturally my mother was a bit worried about my father, though I only mean whether he would catch the *Dordrecht* and not be left behind. However, we did not need to worry because he came back, not in a hired boat but in a motor launch, with sailors with boathooks to hang on to the ladder, and an officer in charge.

"Mate," he said to my mother when he came up to her on the deck, "I may be only a poor blooming Pommy, and that's putting it mild, but I like the Aussies and the Aussies like me."

"Of course, they would," my mother said. "Why not, John, you silly?"

"Different ships, different long splices," my father said. "But, blimey, cobber, they're all right. I had a drink with the Commander, and he's given me a chit to his wife. Wants you to meet her, because I happened to mention you were adorable. I feel like making speeches about democracy, but perhaps, in view of everything, I'll go and kip down before I fall down. Had a good time ashore?"

"Oh, yes," my mother said, just quietly because it wasn't worth more than that.

"Awful dump," my father said. "Give me Aussie where I'm taking you lucky kids—wonderful father that I am, though it's a pity I drink. Now me for shut-eye, all you kids."

And away he went, happy, as they say, as a sand-boy.

Mr. Joshua Bannister, the wool buyer, had been standing close by.

"Ay, that's champeen," he said, putting it on again. "There's a happy drinking man, if you don't mind my saying so, Mrs. Copeland."

"From my heart, Joshua, I wish you could drink as happily," said my mother, much to my surprise, for I had never heard her call the wool buyer by his Christian name, as if he were a close friend or one of my schoolmates.

“And I thank you so warmly for the wish, my dear,” said Mr. Bannister, and he suddenly looked at my mother with such a lovely look that I saw, though he was just a teddy bear, even my brother Michael might have to watch out if Mr. Bannister really wanted to take Stevie away from him, because what was in that look was what made him nice, though he wasn’t anything at all as a dancer on the romantic nights of the Mediterranean.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN my little baby sister, Felicity, fell overboard and was drowned it was awful and worse than that.

I have not said much about Felicity, because other people's babies are apt to be a bore, and yet she was in many ways the most important person aboard the motor vessel to judge by the attention which she received, which was only right because she was. A little baby sister is different from just a schoolgirl sister, like Ann. She is quaint and queer and sillily helpless. My father who is right about everything except Col. Bouverie, says she is just ripe for eating, and although she is a girl he calls her Comical Chris and says if you put a cigar in her mouth she would be just like Mr. Churchill. And she would be.

She is toddling all the time, but keeps sitting down on her bottom. My father says then: "Anything for a laugh!" and she goes into wild giggles as if she knew she was Comical Chris and her audience was pleased. But, of course, this is really wrong, and only putting thoughts into Felicity's mind that are not there, for she lives in her own new world and she is happy there. She has little teeth like a rabbit's and when she gets jam or some dirt in her straight black hair and it hangs on her brow—then she is

more Comical Chris than ever, particularly if a match or something gets caught in it and she goes staggering about not knowing.

My father also calls her the smallest female wrestler in the world, because she waddles about with arms akimbo and dimples in the elbows, so that one would think she was challenging all comers.

"Oh, John," my mother says then, "you are a pig to your loveliest unmarried daughter. You know you can't take your eyes off her."

"Why should I?" laughs my father. "I want to see how she's really shaping. If she should happen to be a world's champion, that solves the problem of who keeps me in my rapidly approaching old age, though I shall have to be her trainer and match-fixer, I suppose. Oh, dear, my work is never done."

So when Felicity fell overboard and was drowned you can imagine.

The worst of it was I was in charge of her when it happened. This was something I was always glad to be, because she was such a Comical Chris that there was never a dull moment, as my father said. You only had to look at her to be happy. If she looked up at you like a flirt, with her deep-blue eyes through her huge black lashes, then you had to laugh, for of course she didn't know about how she looked like a flirt, but was just being gay and a happy little baby.

We were down on the main deck but still in our part of the ship where the cabins were. It was all right there, because the bulwarks were solid steel.

Our part was fenced off from the rest of the main deck, where there were only thin rails, by a gate which the Captain had had made by the carpenter so that Felicity could play without falling overboard. Now she had been playing there happily, with her wow-wows which were bears and sheep on wheels, and her drawers were hanging down as they always did no matter how often you pulled them up, when I had to leave her for a moment but she was quite safe.

I would rather not say why I had to leave her, but I must say because otherwise it will seem strange that I had left her. So I had to go to the lavatory which was on the same deck but inside in the alleyway, and I was not in there any time at all, or so it seemed to me, though it is hard to tell sometimes about the time you are away.

And when I came back Felicity was not there—only her wow-wows standing still or lying down.

So I thought she had gone toddling round to the other side of the deck to use her legs, of which she was very proud, finding she could get about almost anywhere without having to crawl.

But she wasn't there.

And then I thought she had gone inside into the alleyway, but she wasn't there.

And then I saw that the gate to the rest of the main deck was open, and I knew she had waddled out and into the scuppers, which are like iron gutters, where she would trip and fall through the open wire rail into the sea.

Everything was just as it always was, and the motor vessel throbbing through the Mediterranean between Malta and Port Said, but my little sister, Felicity, had fallen overboard and been drowned.

I began to cry, but that was no good, so I ran up the ladder to the next deck, which was our real deck, where everyone was sitting reading, etc., and I ran from there up the next ladder to the bridge where we weren't allowed, and all the time I cried out, "Baby overboard! Baby overboard!" at the top of my voice. You could not cry out "Man overboard!" when it was only poor little Felicity.

Well, one can imagine the scene, but though it happened to me, I cannot remember much about it, because I was in such a state, letting my little Felicity be drowned, that it is all like a dream, only worse.

On the bridge were the Captain and officers because it was near noon and they were there with their sextants to shoot the sun. Immediately the whistle went with a terrifying noise, though it is not a whistle but a kind of klaxon sounded by air as the chief engineer had explained to me.

Everyone came rushing at me. All faces. But my father and my mother, who were of course the most worried, did not rush at me somehow. And there was my father, not funny or fooling but calm, so that he took hold of me without putting a finger near me.

"Quick, boy—spill it!" my father said.

And though a breath before I could not have

spoken a word, I told him everything much faster than I have put it down here.

To look back at my mother is to be proud, because with Felicity drowned in the sea she stayed quiet and only said: "No, she is aboard somewhere!" Or I think she said that, for I am not too sure of this. The ship swung about suddenly and went over on her side like a small yacht such as you see at Eastbourne, and Hollander sailors came running, and a boat was swung out on its davits, and some went hurrying here and some there, and people ran to the rail and looked at the sea which was blue and sunny and bright, as if sprinkled with diamonds. I do remember that. The sea was all bright and sparkling so that you could think no harm of it.

Someone said, and I should think it was Mr. Joshua Bannister: "If the blessed babe is over it is all oop." It must have been Mr. Bannister. And Mrs. Urquhart left her chair, and the missionary young lady and, of course, all our family and everyone ran about, up and down, here and there, not daring to think of what had happened but anxious only to prove it hadn't.

This went on for I don't know how long, and then the motor vessel herself stopped, as if she simply did not know what to do next. The boat was lowered and sat on the water but nothing was any use, and through the awful quiet, on account of the ship being stopped like that and not in a port, you could hear everybody shouting this and that and in a frenzy. It being a little baby like Felicity made everything worse.

So then suddenly there was a great cry from my friend Col. Bouverie, which made him a great hero again and the gallant man.

"Tally-ho! View hallo!" called Col. Bouverie in his fine voice. "Have got! Can do!"

So everyone rushed to the lower deck, and his voice came from the alleyway, and we all fought to get in and jammed in our excitement, but my mother went through as if she were an eel, and there was Col. Bouverie, my Commando, and he had rescued Felicity. He stood in the doorway of the second officer's cabin, who sat at our table.

He waved a hand at a wardrobe at the bottom of the bunk, of which the door was open, and in there on the bottom, below his uniforms and clothes, was Felicity just waking up. Before she had gone to sleep she had pulled down some of the clothes and been dirty on them.

"Oh, you dirty, dirty girl!" my mother cried out, and rushed in and picked her up in her arms in a way which showed she did not care at all how dirty, dirty Felicity had been so long as she was not drowned and dead in the Mediterranean. Everybody else felt the same, so that we all laughed very much about Felicity being dirty on the second officer's clothes, and she said: "Wow-wow! Wow-wow!" and looked up through her lashes, like a flirt. She always liked to have a lot of attention paid to her, even though she was only so little.

So Felicity was not drowned at all, and perhaps I should not have started this Chap. IX by saying so, only I wanted my readers to feel as we did when we

thought she was. The only way was to say so, to make the reader feel that way, which was awful, because she is a very dear little baby with dark-blue eyes, and Comical Chris, and anything for a laugh.

This part should end there, but it didn't.

"This calls for a drink," my father said, "and I am sorry, Captain, my youngest unmarried daughter is such a rascal and stops the ship, but oh, God Almighty, Captain and you all, I am kind of relieved and I want to say thanks a lot for your concern!"

"It is nodings, it is nodings," the Captain said, "so that the little small babe is safe now we are all happy again. Come, we take a glass of Bols, and wipe the brows."

And the Captain wiped his brow and so did everyone, and many nice things were said as we went flocking back to our deck, where the bar was all full of talk and happiness as if it were a picnic or some special occasion.

But it was not over yet.

My mother was standing with Felicity in her arms who was delighted with herself and saying: "Wow-wow!" and everyone had drinks and was happy.

Suddenly Col. Bouverie said very coldly: "One would think that with a little baby aboard, a ship's officer would shut his cabin door and his wardrobe, because the poor baby might have suffocated or died in there." As he said this he smiled proudly at my sister, Rosemary, who looked more beautiful

than ever because she had been crying and upset, which you have to be very beautiful to do.

Then came the great surprise.

"By Yiminy!" said the second officer, who was always so quiet and like a second officer on a motor vessel should be. "By Yiminy!"—and he said it in a strange way, not shy or quiet any more. Then he very carefully put down the little tub glass of gin which was like a little glass barrel. "Now there is much seen," he said, not caring for Rosemary or anyone. "I did think I did see you leave my cabin, but I think I am crazy, and I think you have been, please, next door. But it is not next door you have been, but my cabin."

I should explain that next door was his polite way of referring to where I had had to go.

Col. Bouverie looked contemptuous, which he could do very well.

"What are you talking about, man?" he inquired.

"What I talk about is this," said the second officer whom I would hardly have known. "You are the dirty fellow. So that you can make out yourself a hero before all, and especial Miss Rosemary, you did put the poor liddle baby in my wardrobe."

It was a silly thing to say, but he said it in a terrible way, so that you would have thought the Hollander had become someone very fierce and cold.

"You dirty Dutchman!—how dare you say that?" said Col. Bouverie, red with righteous wrath.

"I do dare to because it is true, you dirty Englishman!" said the second officer.

Everyone was surprised to see and hear all this, and

I thought my father would stop it all, or the Captain, but the Captain had gone back to the bridge.

My father said something that was a great surprise.

He said: "Good for you, Hendrik! Knock his ruddy head off—just in case!"

I had never heard my father speak to the second officer by his Christian name before, but my father always knew things like that without seeming to.

"Champeen, I second thart," called out Mr. Joshua Bannister.

So Col. Bouverie had to fight the man who had said bad things about him, and everyone was horrified and delighted, even my mother, and Felicity said, "Wow-wow!"

Hendrik, who had caused this fight, was not a Commando but just a second officer, and I thought he would be killed. I was sorry. Though he wasn't much of a dancer he was a nice Hollander with blue eyes, and an English Commando was too good for him. Only he wasn't. The fight was very quick, and it was over before one knew it had begun. Hendrik managed to land a lucky punch on Col. Bouverie's chin and Col. Bouverie fell down on the deck as if he was a log. His eyes closed.

"Oh, boy, oh, baby!" my father said. "I can feel my knuckles bleeding and was it worth it!"

A funny thing to say, because of course his knuckles were not bleeding. He hadn't hit Col. Bouverie or anyone else. Then he went across to Hendrik and he pretended to kiss him on each cheek, like General de Gaulle in a news reel, and everyone laughed and clapped.

"This one," said Hendrik then, "says he was dropped in Holland by the parachute. This one has never seen Holland. That I say. Now I must go and make to mine captain my apologies, and the offer of my post."

"Hold on a moment, cock," my father said. "I'm coming with you to have a word about that."

"By goom," said Mr. Joshua Bannister, "if I'm not butting in I'm coming along, too, for without our firm as shippers it wouldn't have been worth building this old barge, except to tie her oop to Wigan Pier."

So the three of them climbed up to the bridge, and Rosemary burst into tears and ran to Col. Bouverie and lifted his poor head into her lap and nursed it. When he opened his eyes he was very gallant. All he said was: "Afraid the Dutchie got me on the wrong foot, what?"

After that everything quietened down, and Rosemary and Col. Bouverie went away together, and my mother said: "Well, well, what goings on, but Felicity, my hug-a-mutch, you're not drowned and, for the rest of the nonsense, I should worry." My mother had caught some of my father's ways of talking from being married to him, and she was shining like the sun which was very bright.

My sister, Ann, was sick on the deck, though the sea was quite calm, but she had never seen a fight before or a baby drowned who wasn't. I wasn't sick, only nearly. It certainly had been upsetting. Even the missionary young lady changed her mind

and had a vermouth, and Mrs. Urquhart had a double brandy on account of her heart.

My mother didn't need anything to drink, of course, because she had Felicity back.

So that was the end of this incident in My Voyage, and the ship all the time after Felicity was found had been going on to Port Said, which is another port where we stop, though it is not a naval port like the others.

CHAPTER X

I HAVE not mentioned the first officer yet, but he is important after the Captain and chief engineer, but in this motor vessel there are so many people that it is hard to mention them all at the same time. He is very smart and his uniform is always the cleanest and best. He is very nice to everybody without regard as to whether it is fun being nice to them or not. He is one of the dancing men, but though he dances with this one and that and sees that no one is left out, it is funny, now I come to think of it, that I did not mention him among the dancers on these Mediterranean nights, although he was always there dancing very well with whoever it was. I think I did not mention him because he danced as if he were part of the ship come to life and out to please.

The chief engineer does not like him. He says: "Oh, that one, the mate. Our Captain he goes on here in the *Dordrecht*, but that one, van Hoffnung, he is a swell. Next he will be captain of the Western Ocean liner and a big fellow, over our Captain who is a sailor. But van Hoffnung, he is a cousin to two directors and lives in The Hague where you must keep a varnished wooden chicken in the window to show how well you eat on the Sabbath. I would not live in The Hague, me, no!

They are great show-offs. I would not have mine Yackie grow up in The Hague and be the show-off."

The reason why I have mentioned the first officer now is that he has built us the swimming bath. And he is most polite and talks to me like everyone else, amusingly.

"Colin," said he to me. "I am just now only the first officer of this Hollander ship, but I have an eye for beauty. Do you know the paintings of our great artists?"

"No, sir," I said.

"No matter," he answered me, "though the point was that the great Dutch artists painted their fat wives, but the Hollander of to-day has a different eye. So that is why I am going to-morrow to have the swimming bath put up, though in a British ship they would not bother yet. Only in a ship like this we are modern Hollanders, and so we like to get what is called in America an eyeful. Here goes then. To-morrow then the bath, and, if it wasn't for who is aboard, they could wait until the Red Sea."

To-morrow the swimming bath was rigged on the main deck in front of our part where the cabins and bridge were. It was a huge wooden box with a canvas inside, and into it through a canvas pipe was pumped the Mediterranean, but the blue went out of it as it was pumped and it was only water. It was lovely to swim in, and above my head, but the sides were close and there were rope ladders to cling to if you could not swim far. People looked down from the decks above, including the first officer, and now I saw what he had been driving at in his remarks

to me. Though it was lovely to swim in the bath, it was more fun for him and for the other Hollanders to see Stevie and my sister, Rosemary, in the water.

Or perhaps I should say the other way round, and put Rosemary first, because all the Hollanders liked to see her swim. She wore a blue costume, the colour of her eyes, and she looked very beautiful in it, with her golden hair.

On the other hand there was my brother Michael's adored one, Stevie, and I suppose because Rosemary was my sister Stevie seemed to me even better. Rosemary was like a beautiful pink and gold doll who might melt away, but Stevie was like a seal even though she wore a white costume. Yes, very like a lovely seal swimming about and ducking under and coming up again, with her short dark hair clinging to her head and her eyes very brown and full of fun.

Michael cannot see enough of her in the bath, nor can I, because she is very nice there. He is always saying: "Hot, eh? What about a swim?" And then I come along, too, because I like swimming, and Stevie goes through the water as naturally as a seagull goes through the air.

My brother was only in the National Provincial Bank before he met Stevie, and he hadn't inherited any literary talent from our grandmother who was Delia Greenwood, the famous woman novelist.

But now Stevie is bringing out my brother as no one could whom he met at the National Provincial. He has started to write poetry which he never did before. I think it is so good, after seeing Stevie in the bath, that I copied some out from his diary,

which I know he will not keep up much longer so this poem would be wasted otherwise.

It starts off:—

You are my nymph, my water sprite;
You are my dolphin of quick delight.
Your limbs old marble and your skin
As smooth as satin and sweet as sin.

Now that is a very good description of Stevie, and so I have copied it out, but he could not keep going like that, and afterwards there are a lot of corrections and bits scratched out, and about them both being fish, which is not good really. He had got out of his depth, so I did not copy the rest. But it shows that travel is bringing out Michael who used to be just a handsome bank clerk with no thought of poetry in him, just putting cream on his hair so that he would look smart and his hair would not curl.

That is all about the bath, except you can do honeypots by hugging your knees and jumping in. The water comes up in silver bubbles and goes up your nose. Now that we are down near Africa it is neither too hot nor too cold, but just right.

Col. Bouverie does not use the bath on account of his wartime wounds, but my father dived off the lower bridge and won a fiver from Mr. Joshua Bannister, who said he had never paid a fiver more willingly because he had never seen a champeen great fool take a bigger risk of breaking his neck, and speaking as another coward he was amazed.

My father was shaking like a leaf, but he stood drinks all round, and he said: "It shows what marriage and children will do to drive a man to take the easy way out."

"One day, John, I shall divorce you on the grounds of mental cruelty," my mother said, but really she was glad he had risked his neck because it proved something to him. I was glad, too.

So that is all about the swimming bath, because we came to Port Said which is a very peculiar place. Men in nightgowns take chickens out of your nose there. This is much the strangest thing I have seen in My Voyage.

They just say Gilly! Gilly! Gilly! and reach at your nose or ear or pocket or whatever it may be, and pick out a real live little chicken which looks at you with bright eyes and opens its yellow beak.

Then they say: "Oh, Colonel, Captain, what do you have here, please sair?" and they take out of inside the passenger's coat another chicken. It is like magic more than conjuring. When they have taken up the collection to pay for the magic they say: "Now I show you last trick, memsahib, and you, General Monty. Please to put an English pound note here in the hat." So that is done. And then they say: "And you, please, Lord Mountbatten!" And then they pass their hands over the hat, and the pound notes vanish. They show a lot of white teeth in their brown faces and go sliding away. Of course, it is all a trick to get money, but a good trick and more like magic. I could not sleep wondering about how he took the live chicken out of my nose.

As it was not a naval port and we had only a little time, my father came with us and we drove in an old motor car with a shrill horn.

The houses were yellow and tall, and the sun hot. Thousands of people shuffled everywhere. Everyone sold things, and cleaned your shoes even if you didn't want them to. There were real camels going along, such as you see in the zoo, and donkeys. Though we were there only a little time, I should think Port Said is somehow a wicked town where people only stay a little time after being in ships and want to be wicked. Only we did not see anything like this or really bad because we were a family party. But it was the feeling Port Said gave you.

There were Arab ladies walking about in black like nuns. Their faces were covered up, and only their eyes looked out. These eyes were very black and interesting and I said so to my father because I could not help looking at them.

"Son," my father said, "if you ever feel like marrying an Arab lady, remain an infidel dog of a Christian, and maybe then you'll never see her unveiled, which may well be the secret of a happy marriage. I wouldn't know, being married to your mother, and there are worse deaths."

Of course, he was only talking in fun, but I think he did know, having been in the navy and seen the world, that the Arab ladies were not so fascinating as they looked. Yet how he would know that is hard to say. He is a Christian himself though he does not go to church. But he is a very wise man

with no nonsense about him except when he feels like it.

Disraeli said to Queen Victoria: "Buy Suez Canal shares." So she did, and we have always owned the Suez Canal, but that was back a long time ago when England was on the up and up, my father says, and now we are world's mugs, so we give everything to everybody. Now we give the Suez Canal back to the Egyptians, who are a dopey lot, but at least they didn't stab us in the back when they thought we were beaten in the wartime, but that's about all you can say for them.

It may seem silly, but I do not like to think of us giving the Suez Canal away because it is rather beautiful though it is only a ditch dug through the desert like a canal. It was dug by the French and a lot of signs, etc., are still in French so that you cannot read them. The ship goes along it with a great light on its bow which glares ahead like a huge eye. This is very dramatic. The water shines the colour of jade which they tried to sell us in Port Said, but my father said to my mother: "Oh, come on, sucker, if it were jade, and I could afford it, I would dress you up in it, my Lotus Blossom."

On either side there is the desert which shows very golden and desert-like in the white brightness of the huge lamp. Sometimes there are palm trees and camels kneeling down or walking in stately fashion, and there are little houses in sudden bits of green where the Canal people live.

Sometimes our motor vessel tied up to the bank and let other ships pass by, and sometimes other

ships tied up for us. A big liner passed us with many decks and thousands of people on it. They waved glasses at us, and we heard singing, and they were dancing to a real band and not a gramophone. Mostly it was quiet, with the swish-swish of the water sucking up and down on the yellow sides of mud. A very queer feeling being in a motor vessel right out in the desert and not at sea at all. You could hear the quiet of the desert everywhere round, so that one spoke quietly not to disturb it, and even the *Dordrecht* seemed to creep along hushing her panting breath and a bit apologetic. You are allowed to stay up late to see the Canal and it is worth seeing.

The people who were specially interested in each other, such as Stevie and Michael, and Rosemary and Col. Bouverie, went away into the quiet of the desert which was on the ship.

"Well, my pomegranate," my father said to my mother, "it certainly does something to you. At least, come what may, I have given you this as a break from Hendon. Just as well we're so well chaperoned down below."

"John, you ass," my mother said, "are you trying to make me blush just because it's so romantic and like heaven?"

"Oh, pooh," my father said. "I can always make you blush, thank God, just by giving you one of my better looks. But wife, darling wife, this is a better gift than a mink coat."

And they sat there holding hands so prettily, and I was glad because in Hendon there had always been

something to do, and there weren't huge stars and a ship sliding along, ship and water saying "Hush-hush—Hush-hush"—as if there were all sorts of secrets.

So that is the Canal de Suez, as it says in French, and to-morrow we arrive at Suez, which is at the other end. There we shall only stay a few minutes to drop the French pilot, who has a black beard and looks like a bus conductor.

The strange thing is, which nobody expected at a place like Suez, which is hardly a port at all but only the other end, we are getting a new passenger there. Everyone is a bit upset, because we have all settled down now in spite of little troubles and clashes, and we do not want somebody coming butting in, because it is like a little world.

At the same time it is exciting, too, because nobody knows who she is except that her passage is just booked as Mrs. Brown. She does not sound very exciting, being just Mrs. Brown, but my father says that is only a mask and she is really the answer to the riddle of the Sphinx, and Old Egypt come back to claim her golden barge. Of course, this is only his joking, but it is funny to think that to-morrow it will not only be us but somebody else, too—an outsider.

On the other hand, and to be quite fair, I suppose it will be strange for Mrs. Brown to just be thrown willy-nilly into our world without knowing anything about us.

But that is the way it is when you travel. You meet this one and that, and never know.

CHAPTER XI

AS I have already described, Port Said is as Eastern as anything, with camels and Arab ladies, etc., but looking back at it now it seems as if it was more a bit of the East tacked on to Europe. That is because we have come out at the other end of the Canal de Suez. One would think that when one came to the other end of the canal and this great change took place something special would happen. Nothing does. Suddenly you are not in the Canal de Suez any more but out on ordinary sea and in The East.

The beginning of the Red Sea after the narrow Canal de Suez is like a big bay. There are saw-edged mountains which look as if they had been cut out of brown cardboard and just stuck there. They are the colour of brown cardboard and very jaggedy. They make you think of pictures in the Bible, and then you realize that the motor vessel is in the Red Sea where the Israelites crossed. That is a surprising thought. You would think that if they wanted to leave Egypt before the Canal de Suez was cut, or even after, they would have gone that way which would have been easier. Even here, at the start, the Red Sea is obviously much broader. But the waters were parted for them, so I suppose it was quicker the way they went.

The town of Suez is only white houses like forts, away off. There were many many ships here, some coming, some going, and some stopped like us. The list of the names I could see is in the right Appendix.

So we had lunch, and though you would think one could only eat ice-cream, the hot food went down very well, and after all, as my father said, curry is hot enough for anything but that was invented East of Suez.

After lunch I was down on the main deck with Felicity, letting her have her run about so that she would bring up windypops before her kip-down. Be sure I would not have left her to go to the lavatory or anything, after what had happened before.

It was by this chance that I was the first person to meet the new passenger, Mrs. Brown, for she came up the ladder suddenly after the pilot with the funny black beard had gone ashore, and we were almost ready to up anchor and proceed on our way. She came up the ladder and stepped on to the main deck as if she had come out of the sea, but of course there must have been a motor-boat down below.

What happened was that I was standing by the little wooden gate the carpenter made to stop Felicity falling into the sea and being drowned, when Mrs. Brown appeared and came towards me.

It was a queer moment because I had never expected the new passenger to suddenly pop up like that, or be like Mrs. Brown.

Mrs. Brown was all in white, a tailored costume that seemed to have grown on her. She had white shoes on and a white hat of a soft straw that nestled

to her head like a seagull. In the ordinary way you would not think of straw and a seagull in the same breath, but this was very smooth, white, clean straw that held her head and yet didn't make it hot. She wasn't young like Rosemary, or old like Mrs. Urquhart. She was no age, like something which had just happened—and happened rightly—at that very moment.

Now I have seen many good-looking ladies on the screen and in magazines, books, etc., and even aboard the motor vessel there are Rosemary and Stevie, but this Mrs. Brown was different. I can only add that, in addition to her clothes, her eyes were huge and blue, and her hair was very golden. Her feet were almost as small as Ann's, and she walked lightly as if she were treading on eggs but wasn't frightened to, and she was as straight and clean as the ship's mast. But having written all that down, which is more than I have written about anyone else, I should think the point is what I have said above—that she did not have any youth or age, but looked as if she had been created, clothes and all, just to step aboard the *Dordrecht* at that moment. She would always seem like that.

There I stood gazing in wonder which was only natural, and she came across the few feet of deck and stood at the gate.

"Would you be the mayor?" she said in a voice of honey. "If so, please open the gate and give me the freedom of the city."

I had to laugh with her.

"I am not the mayor," I said, "because this is a

motor vessel, but I am very glad you are the new passenger because you look jolly nice."

I said this because it was quite true, and because I had been thinking about Mrs. Brown coming all alone into our little world where everybody knew everybody, which I would have hated to do myself.

"Why, young man," said Mrs. Brown, "this must be a delightful ship to send you to welcome me."

"Oh, no," I said, "I am not here to welcome you, but looking after my little sister, Felicity, and it just happened."

Mrs. Brown looked and she said: "What a lovely family! But your Felicity looks like a little boy."

She stooped, picked up Felicity, and swung her up into the air, saying: "You young Turk." It surprised me very much that Felicity did not cry being swung up like that by a stranger, because she was only a little baby and could not see that Mrs. Brown was Mrs. Brown as I saw her.

But Felicity chuckled, "Wow-wow! Wow-wow!" quite happily and did not cry. I was glad. My father says when Felicity cries she looks like a goblin from Notre Dame, which is a cathedral with carvings on.

Mrs. Brown kissed her on the mouth, and even then Felicity did not bawl her head off but laughed, which shows what I have been trying to say about Mrs. Brown.

Then the chief steward came flapping along in his leather slippers all trodden over. I have not described him because he has not come into the story

of My Voyage until now. He is another Hollander, of course, and my father says he is crazy as a hen and one day his eyes will pop clean out, but my mother says somehow he manages to get a difficult job done very well, and she should know having run a house which is difficult but not so difficult as a motor vessel.

His eyes were sticking out further than ever now, and he was flapping along more like a duck in his slippers, for I do not think he had expected Mrs. Brown to be at all like the real Mrs. Brown.

She put down Felicity very carefully near one of her wow-wows, which was a camel we had bought in Port Said, and she began to talk to the chief steward in Dutch as if that was her natural language. The chief steward's eyes nearly popped clean out. The Hollanders are very proud of their language, but nobody speaks it but themselves, and least of all the English. We only talk English more loudly, so that the Hollanders all speak it very well, and that is clever of them—more clever than we English are, I suppose. What surprised me was Mrs. Brown speaking Dutch like that, for she was as English as a rose. She just touched my head and said, laughing: "Thank you, my Lord Mayor, for the keys of the city, and having a little sister like that absurd Felicity."

She went away with the delighted chief steward, and I stood there in a kind of daze until my mother came along and took Felicity away for her kip-down. I didn't say anything about Mrs. Brown, for it would have seemed silly.

Even in the Mediterranean people had slept after lunch, but now that we were in the Red Sea and going along through the hot air of the East the siesta, as it is called, seemed even more fashionable. I did not fancy sleeping down below, and it was very bright on deck, so I decided to kip-down in the smoke-room, for the bar was closed in the afternoon and it was quiet there and really cooler.

I have not, as yet, described the smoke-room, but it was on the upper deck, and it was from there the steward served drinks and played us the gramophone. It was a refinement you would not expect to find even in a modern motor vessel if she was a cargo carrier, but only in some big liner such as the *Queen Mary*. There was a lot of satiny wood, and little tables dotted about with ash trays that pulled out on arms from underneath, and many deep chairs in green leather that you could sink into.

At that hour the place was empty, with only the big flat brown fans spinning round hanging from the roof and making a pleasant sound and breeze. So I curled up in one of the deep chairs, and took out of my pocket Mr. Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* which I was reading with great enjoyment. I did not really want to sleep but everybody else did. But I found I did not want to read either, but just sat there in the deep chair and the green leather was cool, and the *Dordrecht* was still going along, going along, taking us to the Antipodes of Australia.

There was a smell of cigar and my father and my mother came in. I did not see them and they didn't see me. I was hidden in the chair. If I had known

what was to follow I might have sat up, because I should have. As I didn't know, I didn't but remained hidden. In a way I am glad, because it was all most interesting and strange—the strangest and most interesting thing that has happened to me on My Voyage, and something no one had ever expected for a moment.

So my father and mother sat down at one of the little tables quite close by, and I suppose they looked about and saw the smoke-room quite empty, and they thought it was the best place to talk.

My father puffed up a big spurt of blue-white smoke.

"Is my face red?" he said.

"John," my mother said, "it's a most extraordinary situation."

"You're telling me," he said. "You might expect your dead past to come up and smack you in the eye in Leicester Square, but in Suez—I ask you?"

"John," my mother said from her heart, "you won't be flippant about this, will you?"

"It might be better, wife," he said, solemnly.

"Please be flippant," my mother said quickly. "John, she's even lovelier than she was in the pictures we burnt—lovelier than I imagined, even when I hated her most."

"Mrs. Brown," my father said. "One of a million Mrs. Browns. Mrs. Brown who comes aboard this particular ship in Suez of all places. Mrs. Brown aboard our *Dordrecht*. It's fantastic!"

"She's lovely," said my mother. "Oh, my poor John!"

Though I couldn't see, I knew she had taken his hand in that quick eager way of hers.

"I'd make you out a fool if I denied it," my father said. "But for crying out loud, don't worry your sweetness head. This is only some kind of testing before we reach the Promised Land. I suppose it was all too easy."

"And where's Brown?" my mother said. "Did you know his name was Brown?"

"His name wasn't," my father said. "But a lot's happened since then, I'll promise you."

"And she still looks like that," my mother said, wondering.

"They come that way," my father said. "Nothing that happens touches them. They'd make you believe in witches."

"John—don't!" my mother said, and I knew she was pressing hard on his hand.

"There's the devil in it," my father said savagely, and not like himself at all—as if he were afraid.

"The children," my mother said. "They didn't seem to know her."

"They didn't know her when she was their mother," my father said. "If you are the children of a famous ballet dancer, and the husband of ditto, you only know her as a name in big letters. Her name wasn't Brown then, you know. She means nothing to Michael and Rosemary. Less than she does to you."

"Or you, John," my mother said, without making a question or anything at all. Just the words.

"Damnation," my father said, and it was much

more than just swearing when he had hit his finger trying to drive a nail, which he could never do because he was really no use at all about the house.

"And prisoned up here in this tiny boat with no escape until we reach Australia," my mother said. "John, why did it have to happen? We haven't been bad people or anything."

"Not you, my lamb of God," my father said. "Not you. You haven't been anything but an angel."

"Nor you," my mother said.

"In our time perhaps only a nice chump," my father said, "but before then a conblasted fool, or this wouldn't be happening."

"But that was in the past," my mother said. "We can't begin to worry about the past." Suddenly she gave a little, quick laugh, and spoke as she had learnt from my father. "Or can we?" my mother wondered to herself and to him.

"Of course not, my flowering verbena," my father said, and now I was sure he was squeezing her hand. "Divorced husbands and wives must keep on meeting, unless they drop dead of cirrhosis of the liver. Let's not dramatize it too much. It's just one of those infernal, conblasted things. I've been married before, and my first wife isn't dead. Let's not make a mountain out of a molehill."

"I never saw anything less like a molehill," my mother said, and she was smiling that little bit of a smile of hers I knew.

"In my youth, Father William, the young man said, 'I didn't go about marrying molehills.'"

"More's the pity," my mother said. "Oh, John. Oh, love, isn't it a swine?"

"A proper!" my father said with all his heart.

"Shall we have to tell the nippers?" my mother asked. "Especially Rosemary and Michael? It wouldn't matter so much with the others. Oh, John, that means I'm still jealous of her, and I thought it was over all that."

"Maybe I'd best just go jump overboard, but I'm not even insured," my father said.

"I don't think that's necessary yet," my mother said. "I mean, as you aren't insured and have spent all your money on drink, leaving starving wife and family. But I hope we can still stay as we are now, John."

"I shall make a desperate effort," my father said.

"But the worst of it is, love," my mother said, "we've still got to cope. And how! I mean in this ship with her and the children, and supposing you——"

"Suppose nothing about me," my father said.

"Lamb, you're more terrified than I am," my mother said.

"I am not," he said.

"You are, you know," my mother said, and all at once they were laughing together as if knowing they were both terrified was somehow a help.

At that moment, in walked Mrs. Brown. I had peeped up and saw her. She looked so lovely, like an actress who has had nothing to do but wait to come on to the stage. She was perfect like that.

"John," she said, not making it frightening or anything exceptional but just his name.

I heard my father push back his chair to stand.

"Leonora," he said. "I won't say this is a surprise, because we saw you come aboard. We've just been having a cag about how awkward this is, because Rosemary and Michael are along, too. This is my wife, Kathleen, though you've never even heard of her. Nor I of Mr. Brown."

"Kathleen," said Mrs. Brown, not nastily or anything, but just meeting my mother.

"Leonora," my mother said, just the same.

"He hasn't changed much," Mrs. Brown said. "Of course he's older, but so are we all. He's very lovable with all his faults, Kathleen."

"He is," said my mother.

"Exhibit A," my father said.

"Still John," Mrs. Brown said.

"Listen, dear wives of mine, both of you, and apologies to Mr. Brown," said my father. "This is a very sticky position on account of the kids, and the fact we're locked up in this ship for another three weeks or more, so we'd better go into conference, and decide what's what, and whether this and that, and all those things."

"He hasn't changed a scrap, Kathleen," Mrs. Brown said. "Just the same maddening man pretending to be a great big boy. And yet what a fool I was to walk out on him for the shadow of a Count. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! And now he's your's, God help you, you lucky wife and mother. But if this is to be a conference, do you know the Lord Mayor is listening?"

They were startled to think she was crazy, but I

knew the game was up and so I climbed out of the chair.

"I couldn't help it," I said. "I was just here and you happened in and then it all happened."

My father and mother were lost for words.

"I call him the Lord Mayor because he welcomed me to this ship and gave me the freedom of it," Mrs. Brown said. "I also kissed his little sister, Felicity, who is a funny child. They are both yours, Kathleen, of course. I congratulate you. He breeds well. And so mine are aboard, too? Yes, it's a funny set-up. Or sad, or something. But I tell you this, and you must both believe me. Yes, even you, John, who have every cause not to ever believe me again and never should have perhaps—I tell you this, I would give every penny I possess not to have caught this particular ship and so leave everything as it was, which was the right way. But here we are in conference already, and the Lord Mayor still with us. Is that O.K.?"

My father and mother had almost forgotten me, but now my father spoke.

"You might have coughed or sneezed," was all he said. "But I suppose you were too interested in all the dirt?"

"Yes, father," I said. It was no good lying to him, and it had been interesting to say the very least of it.

"I'd have enjoyed it, too," my father said, "at your age or any other, so I won't flay the hide off you, you dirty little eavesdropper. Don't you know you must never listen to what doesn't concern you?"

But perhaps this did. Now listen, lad, I let you live on one condition. That is, you don't speak a word of what you've heard to-day, even to Felicity, until we've decided, we poor three, what's to do. A bet?"

"A bet, father," I said, and no more because that was enough.

My mother just smiled a bit palely and nodded at me, accepting the bet.

"He seems a nice boy," said Mrs. Brown to my mother. "I liked them both on first sight, and really I don't like children and make no bones about it. I suppose it was having known their father ages ago. Now, about going into conference?"

"Scram," my father said to me, and I scrambled.

It had all happened in just a little time while people were still asleep after lunch. The deck was empty, and when I came out, the *Dordrecht* was still panting on towards the Antipodes of Australia as if nothing at all had happened. The cardboard mountains of the Bible were further away, and the Red Sea was a deep and heavy blue, as if it had lead pumped into it. The air was hotter and stickier. I was so tired with everything, and the big hot lunch, that I just sat down in one of the long wooden deck chairs. Before I knew where I was I was asleep, and very glad to be, because I was tired out as you get in the Red Sea.

CHAPTER XII

I DID not wake up till the steward went by playing his little xylophone. He beats it with a little padded drumstick, and it makes pretty silver sounds. He likes playing it, and smiles as he does so, hitting the bars in a gentle, loving way—only taps. He listens to the music with his fair head cocked on one side, and pride on his face. This was to call us to tea, but the Dutch are not good at tea and only do it for the English passengers. The tea is like mud and the milk is horrid.

Even apart from that I am like my father and think tea is a fiddling function with a lot of passing of things, but the ladies like it and talk more at tea than at any other meal. So my father and I do not take tea but have a special arrangement, for he brings me out a lemonade and a great glass of lager for himself, and we sit out on the deck. This is a very good idea, as I have my father to myself which is not often in a big family. I would not change it, not if the tea and the milk and the cakes were like we used to get at Lyonses.

So then my father came out as usual, sat in the chair by me, gave me a wink, and said: "It's a good thing this is a custom, or it would look like a bribe."

"It would," I said, "very much." We laughed together, for it is like that with my father, but I did

not have to go back and say again that I was sorry I was an eavesdropper. That was all finished and done with.

"Ah," said my father, when he had taken a very long drink of his lager. "I won't say I didn't need that. If you take my tip, son, you'll become a Trappist monk—though you won't, for I think you have inherited a lot of my charm, and the ladies, God bless them—though I hope He's not listening—will make things very difficult for you, though I certainly hope not, because you're not half a bad bit of a kid really."

Now it is nice talking to my father when he is talking like this because you don't have to say, Yes, father, or No, father—like you have to answer an ordinary person. He is talking as much to himself as to you, but there is nothing rude in that. He knows you are listening and doesn't have to ask if you are, like people who are afraid you don't like them enough to care what they are saying.

"No," my father said, "you're not at all a bad bit of a spider spinning the funny little thread of your life out of your own guts, as we have to all of us. If you'll remember that, I won't tell you the story of King Bruce, (a) because you probably know it already and (b) because you probably realize that the wretched little spider didn't gain anything by all his climbing. Or did he climb into a legend and live for ever? There are an awful lot of spiders who climb but don't. We wouldn't know, son, would we? That is the end of the parable. Do you like the Red Sea?"

That was a question and different.

"I think I do, father," I said. "It is a much stranger kind of sea than the Mediterranean."

"Yeah," my father said as he sometimes did. "Yeah, much stranger. You kids, who aren't all encrusted with barnacles, just feel these things. Forget it! You're not clever and don't fool yourself. Be quiet, son," my father said, though I wasn't talking at all and he was really saying it to himself. "Let me think. You and your gabble of nonsense. Oh, dear, if only I was a monk on Mount Athos instead of the father of five nearly driven demented! Hush, son, hush."

Now I suppose with an ordinary father one would have had to say that you'd hardly opened your mouth, but not with my father. So I just sat there, and drunk my lemonade, which was nice and cold, and I am really getting quite fond of it.

Of course, it wasn't his five children he was worried about, but Mrs. Brown, the new passenger. We both sat thinking about her, and I wished I could hate her. That would have been the right thing to do. Well, not hate her, perhaps, because we had never had to do that, but not think about her at all, as if she was only the new passenger and didn't matter. If only she had been nasty, and Felicity had hated her, and she hadn't looked like she did, and did as she did, always right, it would really have been easier. Much easier. Then one could have said: Fancy her ever having got hold of father! And a good thing he got away! But it wasn't simple like that. She had been very right with me

and with Felicity, and even with my mother, I should think. That was the nuisance of it.

My father sat thinking his own thoughts, and the sun went towards the cardboard hills which were far away and like hills in a toy theatre now. I had left my toy theatre in the loft at Hendon. It would have got broken. I was sorry now, and I thought for a moment that everything would have been much simpler had we stayed there in Hendon. But then I would never have had My Voyage, and all sorts of other things wouldn't have happened to us.

My father suddenly made a kind of shrugging like a dog that has been in water, and said: "Breaking the rule of a lifetime I think I am going to repeat the medicine. I feel I need it. What about you, Colin?"

I said I would because it was very hot, and it was nicer for me to be thirsty with him.

So when he came back he sat down differently and more briskly, and said: "Well, son, for all the good that came of it you might as well have stayed at the conference. Damn, it was funny her calling you the Lord Mayor like that! Somehow just like her, conblast it!"

"She did it very nicely, father," I said. "I don't have to hate her, do I?"

"Hate her, hate her?" my father said. "Who could? I don't hate her, son, and I can't ask you to do the impossible. She's the loveliest person in the world not to be married to, and you will never be married to her so you can just enjoy how lovely she is. But it's positively improper, this conversation,

and not what I set out to say to you at all, only you wheedled it out of me, you funny little wise old Lord Mayor. Oh, damn it! But, what I set out to say is, the bet holds. It's a pity it had to be made, but that's your fault for not even giving a polite little hurh-hurh of a cough. But there's no need to get in a great cumfuddle about it. It's quite simple, son. Mrs. Brown's a very fine person, and we've decided for the moment to take the line of least resistance. You know our fine life together, and you know there was that other life which ended so long and long ago. The two don't mix. So for the moment we've decided that we'll let sleeping dogs lie—in other words that Michael and Rosemary, who are the only people really concerned, don't have to know. It's the simple, lazy way, I suppose, and maybe we're quite wrong, but, if we are, we're only human, and humans generally are. This is bad, the way I run on. It shows what a jolt I've had. Now just forget it, Colin, and be as nice as you like to Mrs. Brown, and keep your trap shut like a little wise old Lord Mayor, but don't fuss your head about it."

"I'm glad, father," I said, because I was.

"It's as simple, son, as snakes and ladders," my father said to comfort me, though he knew it wasn't.

And then we just sat there and watched the red hot sun go hurrying down, and we thought about Mrs. Brown. Leonora was a prettier name and suited her much better, but I kept on thinking of her as Mrs. Brown which was easier for me, of course, than my father who had always called her Leonora in the long and long ago.

People started to come out from tea, and I was glad that the first was not Mrs. Brown but my mother, looking so nice and herself. What surprised me was that she had Stevie with her. Now my mother had always been nice to Stevie, as she is always nice to everyone being so nice herself, but she could never find it in her heart to really like Stevie. This was hard to understand, because she was so attractive, but my mother had thought she was too attractive to Michael. However, now she was not just being nice to her but better, and my mother is very clever and wise in her own way, which is much deeper than you would think. She seems just a quiet kind of wife who makes her husband and children happy and love her. Now that she suddenly wanted to make Stevie like her she was doing it as easily as could be, without any fuss.

My father smiled to himself.

"Yes, if it's turned into a modern comedy or farce," he said, "let's at least not make it a Greek tragedy. I said all along Stevie was a boon and a blessing. And is she!"

I saw what he meant. If Stevie had not been aboard, Michael could hardly have helped being taken up by Mrs. Brown, and that would have been silly, because, though you could not realize it, Mrs. Brown was Michael's mother, just as my mother was mine. That would have been too silly and embarrassing for words, and made everyone look fools. So I was glad I had always been on Stevie's side.

Everyone came out from tea then, and last of all

Mrs. Urquhart and the missionary young lady, who always were last because tea was their favourite meal. Mr. Joshua Bannister came out with Michael. They had probably stayed talking about cricket, which they liked to argue about. Michael was very pleased to see his mother and Stevie thick as thieves. He wasn't a fool by any means and knew that in her heart of hearts his mother had not valued Stevie enough.

We all stood about and talked a bit. The new passenger hadn't been at tea because she was resting, but she was very beautiful and her name was Leonora Brown, the famous ballet dancer, and she was tired after a long tour and had missed her right passage in the P. & O., and so had caught this fast motor vessel which was the best she could do.

"I hear she's ravishing and a blonde," Rosemary said. "Why should she have to go and catch this boat where I used to be the only one answering to that description?"

She laughed, looking so golden and young that you knew she didn't mean a word of it. We laughed, too, including my mother and my father and me.

But it was funny in the other way, too. I mean the way when you say funny, but meant just the opposite.

When we went down to the bath the water was very sticky and salty, so that it stung the eyes. It wasn't cool to go into. In fact, it was hotter than the air. But now we are in the Red Sea, and ahead is the part called The Gates of Hell, so of course the water would be like that and very hot.

CHAPTER XIII

THAT night dinner was strange. Everything was the same, except that the air coming through the open square windows was even more hot and dry and seemed to stroke you. The brown fans were spinning above, and the stewards serving as usual, but the new passenger, Mrs. Brown, was over at the Captain's table, sitting next to him.

Not that she had done anything to cause a sensation, or had dressed up to impress us, or the like. She just had on a plain blue frock which was right for her, and came in with the rest and was introduced by the Captain who was very happy and sparkling behind his crooked steel-rimmed glasses. I should have described him before because he is our Captain, but when I had described all the Hollanders I had described him, too. He is a good old scout, as we all say, and very proud of his motor vessel and anxious that we should be happy, but he leaves that to us which is probably the best way, and I must say he sees that everything is all right, though he does not fuss about or flap like the chief steward. His home is on the island of Terschelling, where the mussel-man comes round in the evening, and you drink much *kaffee*, and the lighthouse which stands in the middle sees all—even lovers. That is really all I need to say about the Captain.

So with Mrs. Brown at the other table it was all different. It wasn't her fault. Being at dinner on a cargo boat was nothing to her. She went everywhere and had seen many things, and would never have been on the *Dordrecht* if she hadn't missed her fine liner where she would have put on an evening gown and been amongst lords and ladies instead of just us. I had had no need to worry about her, and she didn't need to worry about herself or us but just be nice. Sometimes she would say something in Dutch to the Captain to make him happy, which it did, and the first officer, of course, couldn't take his eyes off her. She knew it was right to be most polite to the Captain, and she made him happy, knowing all about Holland and the little jokes which the Hollanders have among themselves.

Their table was gayer than it had ever been, but not noisily so because Mrs. Brown was just pleasant and quiet and kept everything like that.

Even our table was different.

My sister Rosemary said: "Well, she's even worse than I feared—by which I mean better! I wish she had caught that other boat of her's."

Of course, we were talking quietly, just between ourselves with the chief engineer and the second officer.

"Silly," said my mother. "Silly child!"

"She's a wow and I don't mean a Wow-Wow," Michael said. "Seems to have made quite a hit with Stevie."

My mother said: "The contrast is striking.

Her fairness throws up the kind of dark gypsy beauty of Stevie. I had never realized it before so well."

That was an obvious kind of thing for my mother to say, but she knew that Michael was sufficiently wrapped up in Stevie just to want to hear her praised, and which made him think all the more of her and of himself for dancing with her and taking her ashore, etc.

"I told you," he said. "I knew all along."

"Yes, dear," my mother said.

"I wish Mr. Brown had come aboard with Mrs. Brown," said Rosemary, "all the same."

"Perhaps the Mr. Brown wishes that also," said the chief engineer. "Who would not, if he was the Mr. Brown? There, it is a good yoke, but I do not think I can write him to Yackie!"

The second officer called my sister Rosemary now, as she'd told him to. He made it sound very pretty in his foreign way.

"Rosemary," he said. "You have no need to concern yourself. She is like you—yes, quite a liddle—she might be your older sister because her colours are so—but she is not you, and could not have been these many years. She is not young like you, and to be young—that is best."

"Why, Hendrik," my sister said. "I didn't know you could make such nice speeches."

"Then to me you should listen more often," he said.

The chief engineer began to laugh, and said: "Why, listen please, to our second officer! If we

don't look out he will be in a Western Ocean liner before our first officer—he is such a one with the ladies.”

We all laughed and Hendrik looked shy and fiddled with his fork, but Rosemary smiled at him and so that was all right.

“Mother, look out,” Michael said suddenly. “Father keeps looking across at the new passenger as if she was La Garbo or someone. Don't let the happy home be broken up by a mere ballet dancer.”

“Silly,” my mother said, as naturally as anything.

“But probably he will be like all the other men and want to drink champagne out of her little dancing slipper,” Michael went on, teasing.

“I hate champagne,” my father said. “Filthy stuff. And as for little dancing slippers, they're hard-working things, young man, and if you'd ever done any hard work you'd know that it spells Sweat.”

“Oh, John, you horror!” my mother cried.

“All the same, look out, mother,” Michael said. “Your John's been a gay spark in his day, and he's at a dangerous age. But never mind, mother, we won't give him a chance. One of us will chaperon him every minute.”

They went on talking like that, but I didn't hear any more because I had started to blush. It is awful when you start to blush, and cannot stop and feel everyone is looking at you. You tell yourself they're not and so you blush harder than ever. It

burns even up in your scalp, and you would think your hair must catch on fire.

Because quite suddenly, among all this talking and nonsense, and especially what Michael was saying, I had realized for the first time that Mrs. Brown over there, Leonora, had once been my father's wife, Mrs. Copeland, like my mother was now. They had lived in a house together long before we lived in Hendon, and undressed in the same room and gone to bed in the same bed, just like my father and my mother, and so they had had their children, Rosemary and Michael, just as my father and mother had had us.

I couldn't get over it, and I couldn't stop blushing, which was very silly but there it was, on account of my thoughts.

I think only my mother and father saw me. Other people do not look at boys to see whether they are blushing or not. So my father swung his chair about and called across to the other table: "Mrs. Brown! Oh, Mrs. Brown!"

"What is it, Mr. Copeland?" Mrs. Brown called back.

"My irreverent children are teasing me," he said. "They say you are a vampire who is going to break up our home. Will you please put their minds at rest by telling them that you don't want your career cluttered up by an old crock who thinks the ballet died with the Alhambra?"

He said it very well, so off-hand.

Mrs. Brown was just as good and easy.

"Mr. Copeland," she called back, "it's no use

bribing your family to bring you to my attention. I'd have you know, Mr. Copeland, that I am a married woman with two children, and, worse than that and in addition, married to my Art."

Everyone laughed. Anything Mrs. Brown said had to sound funny if she wanted it to, and the Hollanders laughed loudest of all, though it was not their kind of fun, but they liked to have such a fine passenger in their motor vessel. Only my mother and father knew what it was all about, which was to show that everything had been put on such a natural basis that it was quite possible to be quite natural and even joke.

I stopped blushing, and my father gave me a wink, only a flicker, so as not to start me off again but just saying, as it were: "There you are, son. It's all okeydoke if you don't fuss about it."

So we were all right. However, I did not feel like staying up that night. I was tired, and, anyway, we were going to sleep on our mattresses on the lower deck which would be a new experience. I wanted to go to bed early, which I did straight after dinner.

It was nice on the deck out in the hot, still, open air with the hot Red Sea saying swish-swish-swish as it fanned out from the side of the motor vessel, making a very soothing noise like silk.

I did not lie awake and worry about what really was quite above my head, but went off to sleep, and next the sailors were there with their trousers rolled up and feet bare, brooms in hands, fixing hoses on

to big brass taps, and it was next day. They had come to scrub down the decks, so we had to carry our mattresses into the cabins, and we said we would not go to sleep again just for a mere couple of hours, but we all did. We could not keep our eyes open at that hour and were staggering with sleepiness.

CHAPTER XIV

ONE would think that any kind of wind would make it cooler, but in the Red Sea they have a wind that doesn't. This is known as a Following Wind, because it follows the ship, and the little waves on the leaden blue sea, instead of coming towards the bows, go running along with her and their white crests curl forward the wrong way. Now, if it was a flat calm, there would be no waves and the sea like glass, but on the other hand the motor vessel, panting along at seventeen knots, would make its own breeze so that it would be cooler though it would look hotter.

What we had in the Red Sea was a Following Wind, and it was funny, when we passed ordinary steamers because we were faster, to see the smoke from their funnels going the wrong way. That is to say out over the bow instead of back over the stern. If you put this in a drawing of ships everyone would say it was wrong and what rubbish!

It was hotter than we had ever imagined in Hendon, even when we read about heat in the tropics or went to see tropical films. This made everything seem strange, as if lots of things were not strange enough already.

People get very limp in the Red Sea and sit about, and though they have very few clothes on their shirts

go black with moisture, and it drips from their chins and noses when they fall asleep on deck which is very often. Everyone drinks a great deal, and says it is silly to. It only makes you hotter and damper really. Then someone says they knew of a man who could not perspire at all and he nearly died in this same Red Sea. So they drink some more.

There were good times, too. In the evenings now it was too hot to dance, but one night we turned off all the lights on our deck and sat about in the long wooden chairs with our legs up, and we had a sing-song. We sang a lot of songs, not noisily but quietly, and it was fine in the dark with the stars bright and golden as street lamps, for the further on we went the brighter got the stars and hotter. Some were old, old songs like "I'll be your sweetheart" and "Lily of Laguna," and some were songs of the wartime like "Roll out the Barrel," and some were just B.B.C. and songs from records, but it wasn't much fun singing these and nobody knew the words right through and we hardly ever finished them but hummed. The Hollanders joined in our songs. They knew them as they have to because English is universal. But when they sang their songs we could not join in, because we didn't know them but just sat quiet. And I must say they sang better than we did. Some of their songs were happy and some sad. It should have been ugly listening to them, because Dutch is a language down in the stomach, but somehow when it is sung by Hollanders it sounds just the thing.

Then there was a surprise.

I have said the motor vessel was a little world where we all knew each other before Mrs. Brown came, but when I come to think of it we didn't, though she was not a huge P. & O. liner with hundreds of passengers who put on evening dress for dinner. I don't suppose, no matter how small a ship is, one ever knows the other passengers—not really.

For instance, I don't think I've put down a dozen words about the young missionary lady, for I had hardly paid any attention to her, but it was she that gave us the surprise.

For when we had done with the choruses, she said out of the dark: "If it wouldn't drive you daft entirely I'll sing you a wee bitty of a Gaelic song."

So everyone said: "Yes, do, Miss Dolan, do please," and were surprised and a bit uneasy. It seemed odd her offering to sing. Miss Dolan had never really done anything at all but sit and read and, though she was quite young, talk to the older people in a serious kind of way.

There was a moment's pause, and all you could hear was the *Dordrecht* panting louder than ever, as if she was hot from pushing through the Red Sea. I think this was not just an idea, but due to the fact that every possible place for getting air down to the engine-room was open.

All you could see was the stars and the little red eyes of cigarettes and pipes.

Miss Dolan began to sing then, and that was the real surprise.

For out of the dark where you couldn't see came a voice little and clear like a bird's. I suppose it was like a lark singing, though really I have only read about larks and nightingales. This voice that came out of the dark was not loud or strong, but it was clear and sweet and like Felicity's eyes. That looks silly now I have written it down but it was how the voice sounded. It sang a cheerful little song, as if it were singing itself, and no one there, but of course we couldn't see Miss Dolan in the dark or I don't think she would ever have sung.

A magic kind of song. Although you couldn't understand a word, any more than if it had been in Dutch or even Double Dutch, it made you laugh at some joke it was all about. In fact, when she stopped, you could hear people chuckling to themselves even though it wasn't out very loud.

For a moment after everyone was so surprised that they could not say a word.

"Mary," said Mrs. Brown, and it surprised me to hear her call Miss Dolan that, for you would never have thought in such a little time she would even have noticed little Miss Dolan any more than I had, let alone know her first name. "Mary, I don't gush, but that was perfect. Sing like that to your nasty old dying people, and they won't want to go to heaven. I'm glad you trained as a doctor and not a singer. What they would have done to you in the schools!"

"Hear, hear," my father said. "Just the plink."

"More, please," my mother said.

And the chief engineer said: "That is a good yolly song. That makes one to laugh. My Yackie is a great one for singing and laughing. I wish that he could have heard that so yolly small song."

"Champeen," said Mr. Joshua Bannister. "I don't know B from a bull's foot abaht music, but pipe oop again, lassie." He was putting it on.

Now lots of people who had caused this surprise after being so quiet, would have said they couldn't sing any more or something, or if they were going to sing in a strange language would have been encouraged to tell us what it was all about. But this would have been wrong, and I'm glad to say Miss Dolan did not do it.

All she said was: "Ah, you're very kind. 'Tis nothing but a pleasure." Her talking voice was very pleasant now I came to listen to it, and went lilting up and down as if words were fun.

And then, I think, she just folded her hands on her lap and started off on her next song, which was as sad as the other was gay—only sadder. I do not cry about nothing like Ann does, but I was glad it was dark, for tears were in my eyes like a girl. My father was sitting next to me and I could tell he was poking at the corners of his eyes with his first finger. It wasn't that he'd been drinking, for he'd had nothing but lager all day and that was nothing to him.

"Notice, son, I am drinking nothing but coloured water called lager," he had said to me. "If you ever remember a word of your poor old father's

when he's in the grave, remember this—The ladies can cause you plenty trouble and so can Demon Rum. With either alone, if you're half the bloke I hope you'll be, you'll compete. Never mix ladies and drink, son. That's a combination too strong for any man. Me—I'm going to stick to lager, for if I don't—oh, whoops, dearie!"

He meant, of course, about still being in love with Mrs. Brown though he was in love with Mrs. Copeland, my mother. I cannot explain this, but there it was, I think. A pity, for my father is the best man there is. So he was drinking lager, and only cried about Miss Dolan's song because it was so really sad.

People in the dark perhaps are better than in the light, because they do not have to worry about their faces. No one said anything at all when Miss Dolan finished, but we sat quiet. Without having to be asked, she gave us another song which was littler than the last and not really sad: it was only like a baby crying, and babies often cry without knowing why, even Felicity who is really very happy.

Miss Dolan did not say that was the last she was going to sing, and no one asked her for more, but the air seemed cooler, and the evening was over. Quietly we stood up. The sing-song was over.

My sister Rosemary was nearest the solid bulwark, and she cried out: "Oh, look, look, the sea's on fire."

We all crowded to the rail.

The sea was on fire with cold white light, flashing and sparkling and glittering right away to the black

line where the sky came down. It was the loveliest sight that ever was seen. Everywhere in the sea white fire.

We all exclaimed this and that. Oh! marvellous!—etc., etc.

My father said in a grim voice: "If anyone starts to explain that this phenomenon is caused by minute particles of animal matter, or so forth, or whatever the explanation is, I shall throw him, she, or it into that blazing sea with my bare hands."

He was right, as usual, for there would be some reason like that but we didn't want to hear it just then, though it would be all right at breakfast. We stood and watched for a long time, all of us, but the Hollanders had clumped away to get some sleep. They had watches to keep and work to do—not like us.

Suddenly my father gave a little shiver though he couldn't have been cold.

"Well, I think I'll turn in," he said. "What about it, Kathleen?" He did not often call my mother just by her name like that unless he were worried or absent-minded. I was sorry for my father.

"Yes, John, dear," my mother said gently, as if she were stroking his brow. "I think so. It's been so perfect it would be a pity to spoil it."

They went away together, and my mother didn't even remind me about four bells and bed. Or say anything to Ann. But, of course, she knew we would be all right.

By now everyone was moving, and the bar steward

turned on the lights so that we could gather up such things as books and oddments in case they were damaged when the deck was washed next morning. The lights came on flick, and were blinding after the soft dark. For a moment we stood blinking and saying: "Gracious, I'm half blind!"

Then we saw that Mrs. Brown and Stevie and Mr. Bannister and Col. Bouverie weren't with us.

"Oh," said Mrs. Urquhart, "they've gone to beddy-bys and I did want to stand everyone a drink, because this is my birthday though I've kept it a secret at my age."

Mrs. Urquhart is very fat and has dimples like a baby. She is a nice, cheery woman in her own way, though she is a widow with no children but a lot of money.

Miss Dolan said: "Then indeed we must have one, or poor fellow-voyagers we'd be and all. Many happy returns of the day, my dear."

So we all said that, too, and felt better.

Ann should have been in bed because she went before me at two bells but she asked Michael: "Please let me stay up as it's a birthday!" Michael, for some reason, is fonder of her than of Rosemary. I think Ann is to him like Felicity is to me. He said: "Of course, nipper. Let's all stay up and get roaring tight." He was only joking; he doesn't really drink, only to show he's a man.

Mrs. Urquhart was very happy to have us at her birthday party and only wished everyone was there. She ordered champagne which the bar steward

popped inside a white napkin and said: "Ha, he is goodt, no?"

Ann and I had lemonade, but Rosemary and Michael had champagne, too, as if it were Christmas or a wedding. Anyway, it was a birthday party after all. Miss Dolan has reddish hair and her eyes are green and her skin is very white. She told us that she wasn't really either Irish or Scotch, but a bit of each, because her mother was Irish and her father was Scotch and she was born in the Isle of Man. She was very gay and happy and pretty after her singing. I don't think she was used to champagne much. She did not have a lot, but it brought her out and made her say more than usual in her lilting way.

Rosemary and Michael were as gay as could be, but they swirled the gold bubbles in their tall glasses in a very grown-up and thoughtful way, for, naturally, they were each wondering whether all those others were really in bed.

That was what I was wondering, too, and I did not know what to wish was true. In every way it was so muddled. It would never do if Mr. Joshua Bannister looked at Stevie as he had looked at my mother, and took her away from Michael, particularly just then. That was one important thing. Then it might be all right, and a good thing, if Leonora, Mrs. Brown, became fascinated by Col. Bouverie, which would be natural enough, and he by her. They would make a striking couple, though there was Mr. Brown whom I was forgetting as I had never met him. On the other hand that would hurt

my sister, Rosemary, very much, and she is too young and lovely to be hurt, as I think I have already made clear.

It is all very difficult. There was no answer to the question whether they had just slipped away like my father and mother, though that seemed strange as it was not yet ten o'clock, or rather four bells were just being made up on the bridge. No reason, of course, why they should not have gone where it was dark and quiet on the other decks to look at the sea on fire, for neither Stevie or Col. Bouverie is engaged as yet to Michael and Rosemary, though they will be.

They did not come into the smoke-room and presently we all went to bed ourselves.

To-day it is hotter still and we are approaching The Gates of Hell, so I do not think I shall write any more for a time until it is cooler, but be lazy like the rest. When you write your arms are wet and the paper sticks. Then when you write on that bit the ink smudges.

Besides, the boatswain—who is another Hollander so I need not describe him, but he is a very kind man, tattooed with snakes and girls and hearts—is going to teach me all sorts of sailors' knots up on the fo'c'sle under the awning where it is cool. That will be nice, and better than trying to write in this heat of The Gates of Hell.

Besides it is very difficult writing this story now because there are so many people in it and all is muddled. In conclusion of this Chap. XIV I wish my father would stop drinking lager only, because

he is Such a Man, as my mother always said in Hendon, and is not afraid of anything. We have never been afraid of anything about him, even him drinking. The boatswain's name is Pieter, and he can bend iron in his hands. He comes from Friesland, and his brother is in the Royal Netherlands Navy and an officer.

CHAPTER XV

THE Red Sea is far behind, and we are out on the Indian Ocean and getting much closer to the Antipodes of Australia. We have been to Colombo in Ceylon, the spicy isle of the hymn and that is true, too. But, so that there is not a gap, I must first say that I learnt a lot of knots from Pieter of all kinds and descriptions, with funny names such as Turk's Heads. What use they will all be is hard to say, but it was fun learning them in the bow of the ship. From there we looked back at the decks where the passengers lived, which rose up like the front of an hotel at Eastbourne. From the sharp bow the water went away hiss-hiss.

But really learning the knots was only running away up to the fo'c'sle to escape, so I shall not describe the knots and I do not think I will even make a special Appendix because, though knots are very technical, they are really no use unless you want occupation. Though it is awful to tie a granny, most people do and it doesn't matter.

But at least Pieter and I had nothing to worry about, except about how bad I was at learning because my fingers were all thumbs. That was nothing as compared with having to be with all the other people all day long.

Therefore I shall leave that part and describe what happened at Colombo.

The ship came into a little harbour made of curved concrete walls so that it was as if Ceylon was a crab and this harbour was its claw. The anchor went rattling down, and there were ships all about, and many lights on the shore and palm trees and yellow buildings rising up. Lights went across the water like golden wriggling snakes, and apart from the ordinary ship smells there was also a spicy smell which comes from Ceylon.

Everyone was naturally very excited about arriving at such a famous and well-known place, and there was excitement in the air like there is before Christmas. Only Leonora and Mr. Bannister and my father had been there before. They said it was a lovely place, and though we had only one night there we must make the most of it, because our next stop would be just Australia.

And now I really must admit—because Colombo was important to the three of them—that why I went to learn the knots was so that I should not have to see what was going on between my father and my mother and Leonora. I have to call her that. It is silly to go on saying Mrs. Brown, when there is no Mr. Brown.

It is all very subtle because nothing is going on at all in the ordinary common or garden way. I mean Leonora hardly looks at my father, but is just nice with him and everyone else and everyone loves her, though she doesn't go out of her way to make them.

Then my father drinks only lager, and is nicer

than ever to my mother and very tender and considerate, so that she has never had so much attention in her life, for though my father is very much in love with my mother and always has been and always will be, it has been friendly with a lot of teasing and my father being spoilt rather than my mother. He is only a big boy, and she mothers him as she mothers all of us.

Now he does little things for her, and he was never a husband to do little things. My mother is ever so grateful and she is unhappy, too. This trip had meant such a rest, and an end to queuing, and getting this and that, and ration books, and all the bother, and peace being worse than wartime. But it has all gone wrong.

I do not think I am explaining it well—it is all very hard and subtle.

I do not mean that Leonora is trying to take my father back. She is too good a person to want to, now that he is married again and she is Mrs. Brown.

I do not mean that my father wants to marry Leonora again and live with her in a house as he used to, away from us all.

I do not mean that my mother thinks any wickedness is going on, or that she hates Leonora for what she is doing.

Nor do I, because she is not doing anything wicked at all but behaving perfectly.

So it is all very supple and difficult to explain, which is why I have been funkng writing and tying knots, but now I must start again or it will all

end in the air and my children will never know the story. It is odd, by the way, to think that some day they will be born in the Antipodes and be Australians instead of English as we are, but that is a long time away.

At Colombo a special motor launch came alongside to take all the passengers of the *Dordrecht* ashore for three hours. Having a special launch like this was a refinement you would not expect travelling in a cargo vessel, but only in the *Queen Mary* or a P. & O. liner such as *Leonora* should have been in. It was a very short stay, but everyone naturally wanted to go on land in Ceylon.

The launch came alongside, and big lamps were lit so that we could see our way down. They made the green water the colour of milk.

My father and mother and I were standing together when suddenly she turned to my father and said in her sweet, cool voice: "Oh, John, I've a headache. I don't think I shall bother to go ashore. It's probably like everywhere else, especially if you have a headache. So if you will excuse me, John. Besides, though the stewards are better than any nannies and she sleeps like a cherub, Felicity might just wake up."

Now that was what she said in words, but she looked at him, also.

My father's head jerked back a bit as if she had hit him, which is silly even to say, and first he frowned and then he grinned a big, curly smile.

"You're so wise, my goat," he said. "Have it

your way. You're probably right. Never known the time you weren't."

My mother smiled back, looking up, chin lifted.

"Don't worry about the youngsters," my mother said. "I've arranged with Mrs. Urquhart and Mary to look after Ann and Colin ashore. Never mind the youngsters," my mother repeated. "Just have a good time."

My father gazed down at her.

"My God," he said, "you're a brave woman and a clever one—or the world's greatest fool. I wouldn't know. Let's find out, eh? Remind me sometime to tell you I love you and would ask your hand in wedlock. All right, old gambler," he said. "O.K. All or nothing, eh? Come on, Colin."

They were looking at each other in the strangest way, with so much love yet puzzled and scared inside.

There are some times when you hear yourself saying what you didn't know you were going to say, and this was one for I said: "Mother, may I just stay aboard the *Dordrecht*? If I went in the launch and round about I would be sick. I have a pain in my stomach. I think it is whatever we had for dinner."

Now my father knew this was all a lie, but he did not show it in his face.

"Son," he said, just touching my head a moment, "that's too bad. But I'd hate any son of mine to be sick on long-suffering Mrs. Urquhart, the little friend of all the world. So stick aboard, son, and watch the ships and write down all about them." Then he looked straight at my mother, and said: "There are compensations!"

He had to hurry off then, because he was the last.

It had all been very subtle but I was glad to be with my mother. Everything had gone wrong on her lovely holiday and rest, though nobody had done anything wrong at all and it was just bad luck which had messed things up.

I was planning what we would do with our quiet time, such as playing Dominoes or Sorry, when she stooped down and gripped my shoulders.

"Oh, lambkin," she said, "funny little lambkin!—did you think we'd stick here and play Dominoes or Sorry?"

Queer she should call me lambkin, which was only my name when I was very very little and I had almost forgotten it, but even funnier that she should know my very thoughts.

I was so surprised I could only say: "Yes, mother, in the smoke-room. It'll be fine as everyone has gone ashore."

My mother looked very mischievous, however, and I know why my father sometimes said she should be in gym shorts like a schoolgirl. She looked much younger and gayer, and her black eyes were sparkling, and the deck lights made golden bars on her dark hair. This happiness wasn't put on, or I would have known. It was that all these subtle things that had been going on didn't concern us, and we were only the two of us now.

"Dominoes! Sorry!" my mother scoffed. "My esquire and I are going ashore all alone together, and we shall enjoy Colombo better than anyone."

"But the launch has gone," I pointed out, feeling very sorry.

"So what?" my mother said, so cheekily.

Before you could say knife, she had called the steward, and a minute or so later we were both in a little boat. A brown man stood at one end with long oars which he rowed standing up. My mother and I sat down together and we went away from the *Dordrecht*, which looked very fine and big and bright and a motor vessel to be proud of. Across the black water we went, with lights making snakes in it—just the two of us out all alone on a big adventure.

We neither of us said a word, but breathed deeply and were happy. It was very peaceful, and black men were loading a ship and singing a strange song which floated across.

So it was like a happy dream, just going along in the narrow boat, with the brown man leaning on the oars and not sitting down to row.

As we came near a wharf with a shed on it and concrete steps, my mother looked a bit worried and said: "Oh, dear, I am a goose. I am lost without that wretched father of ours, for I have never been in a foreign place without my man, and it is not as simple as it looked."

We came to the concrete steps and got out and I wished I knew what to do so that I could be my mother's man, but of course I didn't. Suddenly out of the white glare of lights came an officer with a brown thin face. He had on a white coat with brass buttons, and white shorts which showed his

knobby knees. His face so brown and thin made his eyes look bluer. He touched his white helmet to my mother.

By this time the man who rowed the boat had begun to make a great outcry, as if he thought we were not going to pay him, but when the officer said only a couple of words he shut up.

"You must let me help you, mem," the nice officer said.

So my mother explained what we were up to, and he smiled at her with the corners of his eyes crinkling, and he was so good and kind that I did not think I had ever met anyone nicer. It was grand, him turning up. My mother gave him some money, and he went away a moment and came back and paid the boatman and waved him off as if he were a piece of dirt. Then he gave my mother the rest of the money he had changed for her, and they talked. He enjoyed it and so did she.

He said: "Yes, leave everything to me. I'll fix it. At least if you are murdered—which you won't be, God forbid—we shall know which rickshaw-wallah to question."

He smiled his difficult, tight-skinned smile and was happy helping my mother.

Out we went under the arch, the officer with us. Thousands of men with rickshaws came running up. Rickshaws are little carts with shafts which are not pulled by horses or donkeys, but by brown men with only a cloth about their middles and their heads. They do not seem to mind, and are always smiling, showing their teeth which are very white,

their faces being so dark. The officer was very particular. Finally he found the one he wanted, and then he helped us in and we sat in the little cart side by side on a leather seat. The officer made a long, fierce speech to the man in the shafts in a very cold way.

"Well, mem," he said, "the pair of you should be right as rain. I've told him he will be hung from that lamp-post there if you're not. Don't pay him, but when he's taken you around as I have told him, he will bring you back here and I'll see you're not robbed. And believe me, mem, it's nothing but a pleasure."

It is always nice to see my mother treated like that, with love and respect, for she never looks special, or pretends or anything, but is just herself. The more I see of my mother the better I think it is to be like that.

The officer saluted and the man in the shafts ran off with us into the silky night—just my mother and me in a place like nothing we had ever seen before.

I cannot begin to write down what we saw, but we went along shining roads where hundreds and thousands of other rickshaws went twinkling along, the running men lifting high their bare feet. There were many motor cars, which blew their horns all the time, and no wonder. Natives walking slowly along in the street everywhere. Men wore big combs in their black shiny hair. We went through a garden where the trees were brighter and greener than at Gibraltar, and great huge trees spread across and had roots growing down into the ground from

its branches. Now and again the man in the shafts turned round, flashed at us his white eyes and teeth, and explained anxiously what we were seeing. We didn't understand and didn't really care. Fun enough in itself to be going along so twinkling and bright in the little pull-cart through all this strange world, just my mother and me together.

White oxen with humps pulled wagons along with straw houses on them and, in the street markets, red torches shone on all the things and on the shining skins of the natives which were like brown shoes well polished. There were great white temples with palms, like you see at the pictures—only they were real and we could have put out our hands and touched them. The smells were very nasty or very sweet, so that at one moment you might be nearly sick and the next you were saying, Ah!

All alone round Colombo we rode, just the two of us, and the running man leant his elbows on the shafts and his brown body glistened. He was as happy as if he were playing. After a marvellous time he brought us to a huge, great hotel which was all open and white with marble, and fans turning round in the roof like the smoke-room of the *Dordrecht*, but a thousand times bigger. And everyone was in white. The man put down the shafts and we got out, and my mother smiled at him and said: "You wait." He understood, on account of the officer.

We went in and sat at a table, and had a lovely cold drink with strawberries in it though they were tinned. I was proud of my mother, because she was

just as unfussed as if she were in the Kosy Café at Hendon, and looked about and was happy and talked to me. She paid a man with a comb in his hair out of the money the officer had got her, and said to me, smiling: "As simple as simple, Colin. I think I must get a job with Cook's." She was pleased she was able to do it so well without relying on my father.

So then we went out again, and left the music and lights behind, and all the rickshaws came running at us, but our man pushed through them as if they were nothing. Away we went again down a long polished road with palms leaning above and the Indian Ocean frothing up on rocks behind a concrete wall. And next we were back where we started from, and could see the ships glittering and blinking on the dark water, and a lighthouse which was pearly white.

The officer had not forgotten us, and he took some money from my mother and gave it to the rickshaw man and waved him away. The man smiled at us and we smiled at him, and the officer smiled and said: "If you'd given him a hundred times as much, as you would have, he'd have thought you a fool. As it is he's happy, and he knows he'll be remembered because you did not get your throats slit from ear to ear." As he said this he grinned his tight-skinned smile and added: "As if you would!"

In the shed were many natives shuffling about, and people going back to ships like us, but nobody we knew, because we were early. He called up a

boat, which is named a sampan, and he helped us in, saying to my mother: "How much have you got left?"

My mother held out her hand and showed him and he laughed and said: "I should say that is the cheapest night ashore any tourist has ever had in Colombo. You can afford to give him what's left and it will set him up for life. I hope you and the little boy have had a good spree, mem?"

"Thanks to you," my mother said. "When you write home, tell your wife and the little boy how grateful the little boy and I were."

This remark caused the officer great surprise, and he pushed back his white helmet.

"How did you know I had a wife and little boy to write to, mem?" he asked, thin face startled.

My mother laughed.

"Because you were so sweet to us," she said. "It shows."

The officer saluted my mother again in great style, beaming as much as his tight, brown skin would let him. He spoke sternly to the sampan man so that there would be no nonsense about us getting back to the *Dordrecht*. And so there wasn't. After all we had seen, and the strangeness of everything, it was like coming home. We knew every bit of the motor vessel, and where our cabins were and so on. Our old friends, the Hollanders, were going about and they smiled at us. Cargo was still being put out into great huge lighters alongside and the winches were rattling.

That is what my mother and I did in Colombo.

If it is not a very good description, I suppose most people have been to Colombo as it is very famous, but all I have written was only what happened just to us. My mother and I were very happy, because we had been out on the spree together, instead of just playing Dominoes or Sorry which I had expected.

CHAPTER XVI

“WELL, John,” my mother said to my father. “I’ve lost. My dear, you don’t have to tell me. I took the risk because I had to be sure. I knew you were too fond of me and the tribe to indulge in any hanky-panky aboard here, and that was why I wanted you to go ashore without me to-night. You and she would be alone together in the silky night, for of course the rest would all turn into shadows and fade away into nothing. There would be only you and that Leonora in the silky night. But I don’t have to tell you all this—you and I have never needed to tell each other anything, but that’s all old stuff as you’d say. So she comes back out of the forgotten past and claims what she threw away? No, John, let me finish. And claims it without raising even her little finger. That perhaps is the cruellest thing of all. Oh, if only she had been a wicked and abandoned woman. But, John, I took the chance and I’m a goat. So what now, John?”

But even I, who like to write things so that the reader feels it all, cannot go on making up this.

I stop now quickly and admit this didn’t happen, and is only put in because it is what my mother and I thought, without a word said, would happen all the

time we were having our lovely spree alone together in Colombo.

This is what truly happened. When we had given the sampan man all the money, as the officer had said, and been greeted by the Hollanders and been glad to be home, we climbed to our deck, feeling a bit tired. There, sitting in a long chair, with a copy of *The Times* upside down on his lap, was my father with a drink on the arm of his chair and it wasn't lager, but whisky. He was all alone, and jumped up, happy to see us though also very sheepish.

"My little black hen and my beamish boy!" he said, making the silly words sound very sweet.

"John," my mother said quietly, but so amazed.

"Stupid, isn't it?" my father said, "but I hope you're as happy as I am. Now I'm not going to waste time cross-questioning the pair of you about how you've managed to cure your head and stomach aches but tell you both what you want to hear. Excuse me if I rock somewhat." He rocked on purpose, from his toes to his heels, and my mother and I couldn't help laughing, he was so obviously pretending, yet there he was back before anyone, including Leonora. "It didn't work out, ducks," he said.

"John," my mother said.

"I'm a pig to be enjoying this ridiculous situation," he said, "so I'll give you the low-down. Roost, my dear wise little black hen." So my mother took his chair and he put his foot on the end and towered over her. "Apart from setting foot on the quay I have spent the evening with the

Navy. In fact, aboard His Majesty's Submarine *Armadillo*, which, at this very moment, is probably sneaking out to sea. At least they told me she'd sail about now when they packed me off after a delightful couple of hours. Nice people, these submariners. Delightful. Tight as a drum." But he wasn't.

"And——?" my mother said.

"I'm not beginning to sort this out," he said. "You flung me into Leonora's arms. Leonora flung me straight into the arms of the Navy. We were just walking away from the launch when who should come rushing up to Leonora but Commander Mandeville of the *Armadillo*. My blossom, we have not been treating Leonora with enough respect. This rough matlow of submarines practically knelt down on the jetty and kissed the hem of her garment. Not in any intimate way, but just as a rough matlow meeting a divinity. We have been entertaining a star unawares. And apparently, though one never knew it on the lower deck, the commanders of submarines just worship the ballet."

"Yes?" my mother said.

"Now this is the thing that piqued and puzzled me and is going to ditto you, my idolator," my father said. "Leonora, to my dismay, suddenly became like an Empress and said, 'Oh, Neil—just the old Neil. When do you sail?' 'In three hours,' said he. 'Then,' Leonora said, 'here is a wretched Hostilities Only sailor who has been admiring your warship, and if you have to go aboard, and love me as you used to, dear Neil, take him with you and give

him floods of gin, but, whatever you do with him, take him off my hands!’

“Well,” my father went on, “the wretched fellow was a bit taken aback, and he had more ribbons on than you could shake a stick at, and he hated this Hostilities Only, but the Empress had spoken. Who was he to disobey? He turned to me with abhorrence and said what was necessary, and he kissed the hem of Leonora’s gown again and she went off with our rabble to do a jaunt round Colombo. The wretched N.O. and I set out to make the most of a preposterous affair, and once the female element was disposed of, did so. Plymouth Gin and so on. The rest of the story is familiar and here I am. But what do you make of it all?”

My mother didn’t answer for a moment but sat quietly thinking, whilst my father had a drink.

“Oh, John,” my mother said, not dramatically or anything, but from deep inside. “I hate her worse than ever now and yet I have less cause—which is the worst of it. Because if she did it from decency, as she may very well have, it was decent of her. But, oh, John, I’m just an ordinary wife and I hate her decency and she puts me in the wrong by making me do that. Oh, John, I could almost wish——”

My father bent down suddenly and put his finger on my mother’s mouth, which was a hard thing to do from where he was and showed he was only pretending about rocking.

“Hush, chick,” he said. “Let me address the meeting again. Now you and I agree without any

reservations that I am the most attractive man in the world. Right?"

"Right," my mother smiled as he took his finger away.

"Now you and I are seldom wrong, but even Jove nods," my father said, as he used to when he hadn't put the cat out. "Just supposing, stupid, that Leonora saw what was in our simple minds and was determined not to get involved in a phoney melodrama which was only in the minds of a cast-off husband and his adoring wife? Just supposing only for one moment of horrible self-honesty that Leonora didn't want me to go ashore with her, but, if she were going to have an idle moment of this and that, infinitely preferred that it should be spent in the shade of the sheltering palm with our gallant Commando or a boy friend who'd been in a state since the P. & O. went through Colombo without the divine creature aboard? You and I think I'm the cat's whiskers, but how do we know what Leonora thinks?"

My mother just had to laugh.

"Conblast it," she said, using one of his words. "That's almost the most humiliating thing of all."

"Agreed, oh, agreed," my father said. "I wouldn't have breathed it to a soul in the wide world but you, for my ego would not have allowed. But it's just one of those things an ageing man must face."

So my father and mother were suddenly happy again and as they used to be, with nothing subtle between them at all. They both began to laugh in

an exasperated and bewildered and loving way, and my mother said: "Oh, John, you darling pest, get yourself a nightcap."

The bar steward came, quick as he always was, and my father ordered another whisky for himself and lemonades for us. I was glad he had not ordered a lager, because it was all better now though nothing really had happened, which showed how very subtle it had been.

"Oh, John, John, John," my mother said, looking up at my father over her glass of lemonade and quite mischievous and cheeky again. "I don't know, I don't know, but I'm glad we're us. If that delicious bitch of a woman—oh, I'd be a fool to deny she's delicious—didn't want you to go ashore with her in Ceylon's spicy isle, I'm humiliated and furious. If she did a noble and heroic gesture on behalf of you and me and the children in palming you off on the Navy, then I'm still humiliated and furious."

"And so am I," my father said. "As usual, love, you and I seem to have to struggle on together. And now——"

But he could not say any more. At that moment all the passengers came up the ladder to our deck. It was funny to see them appear one after another as if they were marching up on to the stage from down below in a pantomime.

The first was Ann looking just the same, and then Mrs. Urquhart puffing a bit and very moist, and then Miss Dolan, or Mary as she really was by now, and then my sister Rosemary and Michael. The last two had not enjoyed the famous port of Colombo

but were very gay. Then came the explanation of a lot that had been happening whilst I was learning knots up on the fo'c'sle from Pieter.

For Stevie and Mr. Joshua Bannister came up together. They were laughing and not caring at all about anyone else. When they saw us, they just went on together and included us in the joke without telling us what it was. Last of all, Col. Bouverie and Leonora appeared, and they were the handsomest couple you could wish to see, and evidently Col. Bouverie was enchanted by Leonora, which was quite natural, and Leonora was enchanted by him, and would have rather been with him than anybody else—I mean only, of course, aboard the *Dordrecht*, for there was Mr. Brown whom we kept on forgetting.

Now they were all back, the *Dordrecht* sounded her klaxon. The winches had stopped rattling a while before. There were orders and clang-clangs on the engine-room telegraph, and Hollanders brushing through and saying, "Please, please." Everything was very busy. The motors began to pant down below, and they panted up through the streamlined funnel, and all the lights outside began to move round and change. Things which had been there weren't there any more. A breeze came to cool the air. The stars moved and the shadows of the white arms of the harbour also. All at once the ocean was beneath the motor vessel again, and she bowed and swayed. The pilot, who didn't have a black beard, came running in his white shorts, nimble as a monkey, down from the bridge and the *Dordrecht* paused for

a moment to let him go down the rope ladder to his boat which curved away showing a light like a ruby. The pant-pant came strongly from the funnel and the throb from the vessel, and Ceylon was left behind.

Everybody gave a kind of sigh. The nose of the ship swung round and pointed south, and the Southern Cross was up above. So now we were really off to the Antipodes of Australia.

CHAPTER XVII

PEOPLE talk about people having eyes the colour of the sea, but this is really silly because the sea has more colours than anything in the world. The colour of the sea near England is one, and then there is the Bay, and the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, and then the Indian Ocean, and so on no doubt through all the seas and oceans we have not seen. Each one is different.

The Indian Ocean is such a deep blue that I have never seen anything so blue, and it goes down and down into it, not like the Mediterranean which I had thought was very blue, but not by comparison.

I have not described the flying fishes, porpoises, whales and sea birds we have seen, but all these are very interesting, especially the flying fishes. They leap up out of the sea, and go flashing away on glittering wings, and then plunge down into the water again which is more purple than blue. I would have had space to describe all these things if there had only been the Hollanders and us, but the other people being aboard has made everything much more complicated so I have had to leave a lot out, but there is nothing so happy as porpoises frolicking. Oh, they are the happiest of creatures, though they have ugly snouts like pigs. They are very fast and leap about merrily.

That is all the space I can spare for all these interesting sea creatures.

I found Mr. Joshua Bannister leaning on the bulwark. The deck was empty so it was a good chance to speak to him.

"Mr. Joshua Bannister," I said, attracting his attention.

"Choom," Mr. Bannister said, very nicely but putting it on. "Whycawn't thee speak proper? You terrify me with your bright eyes behind your gig-lamps and naming me name like that. Can't you just call me Joshua, like of all the rest. I believe you have too much good taste to tack Uncle to it, for, by goom, I'm not your nunky and never was. Now, choom, what's biting you?"

Written down it looks fierce, but his eyes had that look in them so I wasn't afraid.

Still I stopped a moment to get used to calling him Joshua, though it was the way I had thought of him for a long time, and then I said: "Joshua, it's about Stevie."

"Ay, lad," he said, "that's a subject as near to my heart as is nobody's business."

I couldn't be afraid of Joshua with him looking at me.

"But Joshua," I said. "Somehow or other you've taken her away from my brother, Michael, who was very much that way about her, and happy as the day is long, because he had never met a girl like her in Hendon or the National Provincial."

"I'll bet he hadn't," Joshua said, smiling nicely.

"Then why do you have to take her away from him the way you're doing?"

"Choom," he said, "I should just heave you over the side into the sea, but you're nowt but a small bit of a boy with a kind heart, so I won't. What you don't know is, I'm going to marry Stevie, and I'm the only man in the world who can make her happy and t'other way round."

"Mr. Joshua Bannister," I cried out, forgetting. "You can't do that! You're a good man and it's too cruel. My brother——!"

"Your brother, my Aunt Fanny," said Joshua. "Your brother and Stevie! Ay, that's champeen! That's proper champeen!"

He was laughing, but he wouldn't have laughed if I could have told him the truth about who was Michael's mother, and how, if Stevie were taken away, Michael was almost sure to fall in love with his mother, which would be awful. But I couldn't breathe even a word about that.

He laughed until he shook.

Just then my mother chanced along, and he made her the funny bow he saved for her only, which looked odd because it was like a teddy bear being tipped over to bow.

"Kathleen," he said to my mother, and it was strange to hear a stranger call her by her Christian name. "Will you be the fine lass I know you are and take your horrid little son away?"

"I know he's horrid," my mother smiled, "but he is my big son."

"All the same, take him out of my life," Joshua

said, "for he's trying to coom between me and ma lass Stevie."

"Oh, he mustn't do that," my mother said.

"But mother," I cried out, "don't you see Stevie mustn't be taken away from Michael? They're in love, and if he loses her the modern farce or comedy, or whatever it is, will become a Greek tragedy."

"What's he nattering about?" Joshua asked. My mother flung back her head and laughed.

"Pay no heed to this brat of mine, Joshua—not even in your gentle heart," she said. "Go right ahead and marry the girl. All that's wrong with Colin is that he listens to the wild and windy talk of his revered father."

Joshua looked at my mother and said a strange thing, for what he said was: "I don't have to tell you, Kathleen, that if it wasn't for that same father I wouldn't be pursuing the difficult Stevie."

My mother crinkled her face at him so prettily.

"My, my Joshua," she said, "I thought it was only the Irish and the Scots and the Welsh who were allowed to be fey and peculiar. I never came across a Yorkshireman who was that way before. But I'll tell you this, Joshua," my mother went on, "it does a working wife and mother the power of good to hear such fairy rubbish."

They laughed together as if they had known each other all their lives, which surprised me because of course they had only met aboard the *M.V. Dordrecht*.

Just then there was a sudden outcry and excitement. My sister, Ann, had fallen down another

ladder, as she was always doing. This time it was serious, because her leg hung out stiffly in a funny broken way when she was picked up, so at last things were as bad aboard the motor vessel as she had always said they would be. She fainted right away, the freckles turning yellow on her white face.

CHAPTER XVIII

WE crossed the Equator some time ago with the usual ceremonies which the Hollanders did very well, but I have not bothered to put it all down. Many people have crossed The Line, and it has been described so often that it would be silly to describe just what happened to us. Hearing about parties can never be the same as being at them, so it is useless really to talk about your parties which were fun. As I have often noticed this makes the other people yawn.

The Hollanders did it all very well, with Neptune with a rope beard, and the costumes first class. Everyone had a happy time except that, in the rough and tumble in the bath, something went wrong and by bad luck Col. Bouverie got a cut in his head and a black eye. Of course, they were giving him a rougher time because he was a Commando. All the same, as it was an accident and such things happen, I was sorry that he lost his temper and behaved so badly and almost spoilt things. A gallant soldier should take the rough with the smooth. My sister, Rosemary, was awfully upset and Leonora was even worse.

I was glad Ann had broken her leg because she would have been sick.

I felt a bit sick myself, but everyone, especially

the Bears, were all very sorry, explaining that it was just such a pity it had happened as it was all in fun.

The chief engineer was Neptune. He said every time he crossed The Line he felt sorry that Yackie was not there to see how good he was. I told him I could understand that as he was really very good, and he said that was nice to hear and I reminded him of Yackie although I was not at all like him. That was true. I had seen Yackie's picture in a sailor suit with ribbons at the back of his cap.

The only other thing that was different from all the other crossings was that lots of the questions and answers with the younger officers and crew were done in Dutch. At some of these questions and answers the Hollanders laughed very loud, while we stood not understanding but smiling politely.

Only, of course, Leonora understood Dutch, like she did everything else, and she enjoyed these jokes, and the Captain and especially the first officer and all were highly delighted, and winked. She took it in good part. She was much too fine to be troubled by little people's winks, even the Captain and first officer of the *Dordrecht*.

Every time she put back her head on its white smooth neck, and laughed just for the fun of the thing and not worrying about anyone else, then my father also had to laugh his huge happy laugh.

This puzzled my mother and she said: "Why, John, don't tell me among your other secret activities you have been learning Dutch."

"Why, no," my father said. "But if you knew the

serene and sublime creature of fire and air who is Leonora as I did, you would know that it has to be a fine broad bit of dirt to make her laugh as if she were laughing with the angels. I am not going to miss anything of that kind just because I am uneducated. I laugh like anything and imagine what was said. Probably my guess is better than their simple clowning, and so I am one up really, which makes me feel superior and is balm to my wounded pride."

"Always be you, John," my mother said, and squeezed his arm.

"Say that again, my eiderduck," my father said. "It helps."

So my mother just said it again, and that was all right.

I will leave this ceremony at that, and say we are now through the dreaded Doldrums, but that is only another of my tricks to make the reader feel as one does.

The very word Doldrums is grim in itself. Everything I had read about them had made me think they were terrible, but really they are nothing any more. Though the sailing ships used to stay in their clutches for ages, a motor vessel simply goes through them in a couple of days. There are just rain clouds coming up and then sudden hammering rain coming down, and water spouting from everywhere. Then sunshine again and so on, and the sea is the colour of lead. There isn't any steady wind but sometimes calm, and then a wind from here and then one from there. That is what made the Doldrums bad in the old days.

It is funny to think that now we are sliding downhill down the globe which seems to make the time go faster, or it may be just that we have left the Old World behind and now all that matters is the Antipodes of Australia.

The fuss that was made when Ann broke her leg surprised me. You would have thought it was Felicity. Everybody was in an awful state, and after my father and mother, most of all my brother Michael. As I have already explained, Ann to him is very like Felicity to me, which shows that everybody is different as I am learning more and more.

There are many refinements on the *Dordrecht*, some of which I have already mentioned, such as the relay for the gramophone, but it was little short of a miracle that Mary Dolan should be aboard. In the ordinary course there would not have been a doctor because the *Dordrecht* does not carry one. Although she could sing like a wren or a lark or something, and was so sweet, and although she was a missionary, Mary was also a fully qualified doctor. When we said it was a miracle she only laughed.

"He seeth the sparrow fall," said Mary, "and what a dear, poor, hurt little sparrow, God's mercy on the blessed child."

Now the way she said these words was very pretty to hear in her up and down voice. I don't think I have ever heard prettier words said.

And my brother Michael looked at her as if he had suddenly met Florence Nightingale or an angel of healing or someone like that. Tears were in his

eyes, which I had never seen before, as he is a grown-up man, and very cynical and clever. Mary just took charge of everything, and everyone was sent away except the second officer, who knew First Aid, and the Captain who was worried. At first we all stood outside and were upset, for we were far out in the Indian Ocean, and there wasn't a doctor aboard—only Mary Dolan, who somehow didn't look like one and was a missionary.

Michael went to and fro carrying things that Mary had asked for, and we waited in a numb and troubled way, though the M.V. *Dordrecht* went on pant-pant pant-pant as if nothing had happened.

At last the Captain came out, mopping his round face and beaming like the lighthouse on his island where the mussel-seller came in the evenings.

"This is goodt," he said. "This is ver' goodt. You don't know how lucky you are, you Mistair Copeland, and you, Mistress Copeland. Many years, oh, many am I at sea. I know all about the doctors of ships. They must have four brandies and a shot of something before their hands are steady enough. Otherwise they are making much money on shore and not at sea at all. Here we are lucky—we don't have no doctor. Instead we have the young woman. Her hands are steady as the North Star." He looked pleased. "That is goodt," he said. "I speak English with slang and all. Yes, by Godt. So you see my meaning? Our liddle child that falls—her leg will be goodt and well again. I have seen many a broken leg and things, but never before did I see one so kind and clever and sure as this

young woman who sings so sweet. Oh, yes, there is no more trouble. You may rest happy, gentlemens, ladies, children. It is Okay, as you say. A worry it has been to me, because I am the Master. Please now, those who will to join me in a glass of Geneva? The little leg that is set like that will be straight and sure as it ever was."

This made us all happy. The Captain was so certain and shining. I was happy, too. I would not have liked my sister, Ann, to be lame or hurt. She is really awfully nice, though I have not said much about her because she is, of course, just a schoolgirl, and that is not an interesting stage to write about—not like grown-ups or little funny babies even.

So up in the smoke-room the happy Captain stood drinks, and it was nice of him to do that, because really it was not his fault that Ann had fallen down a ladder and broken her leg.

My father did not drink lager but Geneva which is gin, and it is in a little small glass like a barrel. My mother and father and I were at one little table. Rosemary was over at another with Col. Bouverie who had recovered from his hit on the head, and his eye was nearly better though still a bit funny. Leonora was with them. At another table sat Stevie and Joshua and Mrs. Urquhart, and the first officer went from this table to that as if he had paid for the drinks because the Captain had had to go away. The chief engineer and the second officer leant on the curved bar and were amused at the first officer being so correct and smart. You could see

them laughing under their white coats and brass buttons, but he really did it very well, acting as if he were the Captain himself as in a way he was when the Captain wasn't there, but he rather overdid it.

"Chook, chook," my father said to my mother. "Cluck, cluck. This is a turn-up you didn't expect!"

"No," my mother said. "I didn't expect such luck, for as it had to happen it turns out luck."

Now it seemed strange to me to hear my mother say it was luck about Ann breaking her leg, so I listened which I had been only half doing before.

"It would have been better if Josh hadn't cut him out with Stevie," my father said.

"Oh, Stevie," my mother said. "I wasn't ever really worried about her. She's a good girl in her own way."

"But you were, you know," my father said. "I recall as if it was yesterday that I rejoiced it was Stevie, and not a games mistress from Roedean."

"Silly," my mother smiled, for she was happy.

"Now even worse has happened," my father said. "A girl missionary full of Celtic lure, and pretty as an apple and talking, Glory be to God, with the tongue of a girl leprechaun! Not to mention her singing! She is the means of saving the leg of his kid sister. Do you feel, Mrs. Copeland, that you have not so much lost a son as gained a daughter?"

"One of these days," my mother said, "I shall put you across my knee and teach you where you get off. Nothing could please me better. Mary is everything I would ask in a girl. Or any other mother."

"Okay, Mother Machree," laughed my father.

"And you don't mind your fine great boy going off to spend the rest of his life missionizing wretched brown men, and putting dusky belles into Mother Hubbards so that they'll be never worth photographing again and will all die of pneumonia instead of the more burly diseases of the old days?"

My mother had to laugh.

"Idiot!" she said. "And anyway I've talked with Mary. I think she is a doctor first and a missionary second. I think she would as soon heal and help Australians as heathen."

"It comes to the same thing," my father said, "but if our son had to get entangled with a games mistress or adventuress on this voyage I'll admit he might have done worse. With her looks and her skill she should be able to build up a nice little practice in Australia, especially if she sings to them. She may not be Melba but she has something Melba hadn't. As for our son, he will look fine in a white coat opening the door to patients."

"You're as happy as I am, John," my mother said, "so don't think you can fool me. They'll make a lovely life, those two, in the great new country you're taking us off to. If they don't, then we might as well have thrown Aunt Faith's legacy into the rubbish bin."

"Of course, of course, goose!" my father said. "If I were twenty years younger you'd have another matrimonial problem on your hands. Talking of such things, how is it that Stevie wasn't good enough for your son, but is good enough for your spiritual lover, Josh?"

"Nothing of the sort," my mother said, blushing like a young girl.

"Oh, yes," my father said. "I may be only a spurned ex-husband in some quarters, but I still have eyes in my head. Oh, yes!"

"John," my mother said. "You don't really think——?"

"You blush more prettily and guiltily than any mother of a family I know," my father said. "And aren't you proud of your worshipper? Yet you're as big-hearted as Leonora on a smaller scale. You can stand aside, and let Stevie snivel him up."

"Oh, John, it isn't fair to trample into a girl's dreams," my mother laughed. "Especially with your great feet. But Stevie's right for Joshua. Don't you remember the night he threw the wine glasses overboard and you were so upset?"

"I was not so upset," my father said, though he couldn't make it sound true. "It was an extravagant and sentimental gesture which I could only have forgiven and understood in myself."

"Precisely," my mother said. "And only somebody like Stevie, who knows all the answers, could make such a nice sentimental fool snap out of it. Besides, she will make a good wool buyer's wife. She will travel well, John."

"Champeen," my father said. "And if it comes to that, I think I said way back in the Mediterranean or before, that old Joshua was no nitwit."

"Once he said to me," my mother remembered, "that he envied you drinking so happily. Look at him now, John."

"How right you are, my unique little teetotaler," said my father. "Which reminds me there is time for one before chow to celebrate our daughter's broken leg and—oh, this and that!"

At lunch the Captain told us that we had crossed the Tropic of Capricorn so we were out of the tropics—although it was called the Tropic of Capricorn—and getting on in fine style. It is funny to think that we have come so far from Hendon in the *Dordrecht* that we are almost upside down. It is an idea I cannot really get properly into my head.

CHAPTER XIX

SO we rushed on down the underneath side of the world faster and faster, and the motor vessel panted as if eager to get there and stop and rest. The Southern Cross was high in the sky, but it was really a disappointment. I had expected somehow that it would cover the whole sky, like it covered the blue on the flag of the cruiser at Malta, but you would never have noticed it if it had not been pointed out. Of course, it is the same with Mars and Venus and all the other stars. They are too far away and small, even when they seem bigger in the Tropics, so that I wonder why people really worry about giving them names. They are all right as a host of things seen together, but not important as themselves, the way the sun and moon are.

This evening we shall arrive at Fremantle, which is in West Australia and the port for Perth. Though we shall go on further round Australia, which is a huge place and much bigger than anybody knows, still I cannot help feeling that My Voyage really ends there because it is the story of my voyage to the Antipodes of Australia, and after all, when we get into Fremantle we are there. Everything after that will be my Life in Australia.

Last night really was, I suppose, the climax, for a lot happened.

There had been a lovely sunset, much better than

we ever saw in the Tropics, but it seems that is often so in spite of all the fuss that is made about tropical sunsets. I will not describe it, however. A sunset like that is a thing that cannot be written down, or even painted I should say, so it would be silly for me of all people to attempt to do so.

We had a huge and special dinner with turkey, etc., and everyone was merry.

The bath has been taken down, and though most of us have still a long way to go, there was a queer feeling in the air as if it was all over, and almost as if one should be packing up trunks.

This made everyone keyed up, especially my sister, Rosemary. She has not been happy at all since Leonora took Col. Bouverie away from her, and though Hendrik, the second officer, who sits at our table, has been in heaven, and she has danced with the first officer who is there always smiling for passengers to dance with, she has been hurt and sad. It is not nice for such a beautiful girl as my sister, Rosemary, to find she cannot have whatever she wants, and that someone else can come in and just take it away from under her nose without even having to try hard to do so.

What seemed like the last night was very beautiful with a lovely moon which flickered all the sea with chips of ice. The air was much cooler and more alive and not heavy and hot. The bar steward was very busy and playing us music on the relay system from the gramophone. We knew all the records fairly well now, and had our favourites and asked for this one and that.

Michael and Mary were down keeping Ann happy, or if not they were on No. 3 hatch, which was on the main deck but near enough to her cabin should she call out. They liked to sit there. It was away from everyone and everything, and you heard the water swishing away from the sides and saw the lit-up parts of the ship, so bright and gold, while you were in the silver of the moonlight or just the shine of all the stars. This is natural, because they are very much in love. It surprises me how quickly Michael has forgotten about Stevie, but, of course, Ann breaking her leg and Mary being a doctor helped a lot. It is interesting to see how little things like that, which one would never expect, can change lives.

The rest of us were up on our deck dancing and drinking, as I have mentioned, and everybody was more friendly and together than they had been for a long time. There was more changing of partners and general talk, as if everybody were sorry that tomorrow it would be all finished and were anxious to crowd in as much as possible.

It so happened that Col. Bouverie and Stevie and Joshua and the Captain and officers were inside having a drink in the bar, and Rosemary, in a kind of desperate way, stopped suddenly going in to join them and instead paused before Leonora.

So Rosemary suddenly paused. Now she had taken her beating very well, as my father's and Leonora's daughter should have done, but suddenly she paused before Leonora.

"Leonora," she said. "I should hate you, but I can't. Oh, I should hate you!"

Now the only person there who did not know the truth was Mrs. Urquhart, who was sitting beaming, but the rest of us, if they felt as I did, had cold shivers running over them and their hair was almost standing on end.

"There's no reason for you to hate me, Rosemary," Leonora said, not too sweetly and not too coldly, just stating a fact. "When you're my age, child, you will know that love's a thing that isn't nice and logical. It strikes like lightning, willy-nilly. It strikes the just and the unjust, and there's no explaining and no use crying."

"But I love him," said Rosemary, sad like a rose in the rain.

"And so do I," said Leonora, "so what can we do about it? You wouldn't expect me to resign, would you? You wouldn't resign if it was the other way about. Would you, Rosemary?"

"Never," said Rosemary, tilting up her chin.

"That's how I feel," Leonora said, folding her small hands on her lap, and looking at Rosemary so tenderly yet sternly, too.

"Oh, I know I'm only a bit of a kid, and you have everything," Rosemary said. "I'm not really surprised at what's happened. That would be silly, and not facing facts. But you have everything and why should you want him?"

"I do," said Leonora. "And there it is, my dear."

"But, though you don't look it, you're old enough to be my mother," said Rosemary bitterly.

Now when she said this, my father and mother ached all over—I did, also.

"Oh, Leonora," my mother cried out. "I really must insist that you——"

"Please, Kathleen," Leonora said, as calm as the moon in the sky. "I am not so wise as you but I know my homework. You must allow your daughter and me to end this little chat in our own way. We are in conference."

"Yes, mother, don't try to help or anything—stay out," Rosemary said. "Though as a matter of fact the conference is all over. She's got him, and I don't blame her for wanting him, and I don't blame him for preferring her. I suppose I've just got to grin and bear it. But if you and father and Colin weren't here I'd use some language which would startle you—though I can't see how it could if you weren't here!"

She straightened up, smiling at that last, but in a woe-be-gone kind of way, but very lovely to see.

Leonora suddenly clasped her hands and looked up at Rosemary as if she were a saint or some lovely delicious thing.

"Her father and mother's daughter," said Leonora, not in a great state, just saying what was true. "Child," she went on, "I know all the words you are saying, and, possibly, I only say possibly, some worse or better ones. I am saying them all and more savagely than you are. But still I must take him. You will not believe it yet, but sooner than you think, you'll fling back your golden head and laugh for joy and know me for a silly old woman. To me he is just another thing I chance to want. I could tell you that to you he is poison ivy, and if you

weren't the dear child you are, and so wise under your beauty, you would claw my eyes out. But a day will come and a man—and I do not mean our adoring second officer—who will show you how lucky you were that you were cut out from your heart's desire by a famous ballerina, poor sucker."

"God!" my father said, and pressed his hands to his brow and rocked a bit from side to side.

"Pardon?" said Leonora, as if she was somebody in a shop, yet making fun of him and herself so that I could have burst out laughing, only it was all too strange and interesting and serious.

"A witch," my mother said, almost to herself. "John was right. Oh, one can't compete with witches."

Now neither Mrs. Urquhart or Rosemary knew what she really meant but the other three of us did.

"I sincerely hope," said Leonora, light as a feather, "that you did say witch because of course I am. I don't deny it. Never have. Otherwise I couldn't be me, could I? But at least give me credit, Kathleen, for playing my big scene well."

"Oh," my mother said, "Leonora, you beast, that's the worst of it."

My mother and Leonora exchanged one little look and laugh, which didn't take the quarter of an instant and was just for themselves. I couldn't make head or tail of it, but it warmed me just when I was cold with worry.

"If only," my father said, "I had been caught young and put in the Vatican choir, I might have been a wise and serene cardinal now, with nothing to

worry and upset me except matters of dogma. I should have made such a rosy and unperturbed cardinal, the happy celibate."

"But you would have missed a lot of fun," Leonora said, and we three gulped for different reasons at the look she gave him, which might have meant nothing or more than one dared to think, but was done so quickly and easily that it might never have happened.

All this being subtle has taken a long time to describe but really, with people just talking, it was over in much less time than in the ordinary way would have passed while one said it was a nice day and a thing or two like that. I have had to explain a lot which didn't have to be explained to those who were there.

A minute after it started it was all over, and Rosemary said: "Well, that's that, and he's yours."

"Yes," said Leonora. "Yes, I'm afraid so, dear."

You would have thought that it was that, but it wasn't. Mrs. Urquhart, who had been sitting there, kind and fat and not really involved at all but just a friendly bulge in a chair, all at once spoke up.

"This is the last night," she said, "and so I feel, perhaps, I can break my vow of silence, particularly as I have heard your talk, my dear children. Yes, Mrs. Brown, you must excuse me calling you a child, too, but that is what you are. I suppose it is natural for a great artist to remain a child, and so you must excuse me."

"Of course I do," laughed Leonora, "and I'm flattered, but—though I hate having to use such an overworked tag—I don't understand."

Everybody looked at Mrs. Urquhart, unable to imagine what she was getting at.

"My dears, I've a surprise for you, and it's a secret, but then a surprise should be, shouldn't it?" She laughed so pinkly and chubbily that, without knowing why, we all laughed with her despite our great bewilderment. "I'm not a dancing woman or a young gadabout," Mrs. Urquhart said, "and prefer to lead my private life in private. That is why what has been going on under your noses has not been obvious to you. But——"

Before she could go on, my father burst into one of his huge happy laughs. I think it was the best I have ever heard him do.

"Don't tell me—let me guess," he said, when he could speak again, which gave us time to recover from our surprise. "Don't tell me. My guess is that you and Bouverie have changed your plans and are going to leave the ship at Fremantle to-morrow and be married!"

We were all taken aback at my father, who was no fool, making such a silly statement, but nobody was more surprised than Mrs. Urquhart. She looked just like a great baby who is going to burst into tears and her dimples trembled.

"Oh, you mean thing, Mr. Copeland," she cried out. "Now you have gone and spoilt my surprise. However did you, of all people, know?"

"I have wires up my sleeves and use mirrors," my father said. "It's legerdemain."

While this was going on my mother and Rosemary and Leonora all said, "Well!"—together in a chorus,

each in her own way. Well is a short and ordinary word, but they made it mean a lot.

For to think that Mrs. Urquhart of all people had played such a game and landed the prize of Col. Bouverie was simply unthinkable. It upset me a lot because Col. Bouverie is such a splendid gallant man that he is only fit for Leonora or Rosemary, and is certainly much too good—a million times so—for Mrs. Urquhart.

“Don’t be cross with Boo and I for playing you this trick,” she said. “We decided we were affinities a long time ago. Boo, who is very clever, found our horoscopes and numbers were right, so, of course, that settled everything. But we felt shy about making any announcement, and I did want him to have what you might call his last fling with you dear girls—if you’ll excuse me calling you a girl, Mrs. Brown, but then ballerinas, like primadonnas, have the secret of eternal youth, I always say.”

“Oh, Allah, give me strength!” my father cried out then, and jumped up and ran to the bulwark as if he was going to be seasick. It was a calm and lovely night, however, and he had been in the navy, so it couldn’t be that. He braced himself on the rail and gazed up at the moon and his whole body shook so that he might have been either crying or laughing. I should think he was laughing, because it was very funny to think of Leonora and Rosemary being out-done by Mrs. Urquhart for Col. Bouverie, with his handsome face and body and having decorations and being in the Commandos and strangling sentries with his shoe-laces and blacking his face.

But still it was sad, too, and I could have cried a bit myself, for though either Leonora or Rosemary would have been all right for my Col. Bouverie, Mrs. Urquhart wasn't.

Just at that moment everybody came flocking out of the bar, having finished their drinks.

Then Mrs. Urquhart jumped up and said: "Oh, Boo, don't be cross with me, but I've had to tell them!"

For part of a second Col. Bouverie looked staggered and amazed, which was natural seeing it was a secret, and then he said gaily: "Yes, indeed, congratulations are in order, what? Mrs. Urquhart, or Isabel as I can call her at last, and I have decided to leave the ship in Fremantle to-morrow and be married!"

Of course, at this everyone who hadn't heard before cried out in great amazement, trying hard not to make their surprise too great because that would have been rude. And everyone shook hands and said congratulations. It was a treat above all to see the faces of Stevie and Joshua, which were a study.

"By goom!" Joshua said. "By goom! By goom!" He ruffled his hair, and Stevie said: "Sausage, I told you the world was a comical place and not worth a tear. The laugh of a lifetime! Have this one on me!"

One could tell they were getting on very well.

My sister, Rosemary, had vanished from the scene. I think she could have faced losing Col. Bouverie to Leonora. It would have hurt but was inevitable. She could not face him going to Mrs. Urquhart,

which was natural enough. I thought of going after her to tell her how sorry I was he had flung himself away, and that it must be Mrs. Urquhart's money, but I didn't. Everyone knows that girls are much better for a good cry.

My father had come back, and Col. Bouverie and Mrs. Urquhart went into the smoke-room.

"Dear wife of mine," my father said, "I apologize. I apologize to the gallant soldier. Ages ago I said if he were half the cad I thought he was he should have known about Mrs. Urquhart being worth a cool couple of hundred thousand. I did an intelligent and gallant fellow an injustice. Obviously he knew all the time. He was wise to his onions. Oh, really, I'm sorry I misjudged him so."

"You're sorry? You're sorry?" Leonora said. "What about me? Here I stage a really lovely act. A pip. Beautiful but unknown mother saves daughter from adventurer at price of daughter's affection. She suffers agonies of misery and boredom in doing so. And now in the end, beautiful but ill-informed daughter thinks her rival, who is really mother, has been beaten by the Urquhart. Oh, honestly, John, Kathleen, this is too much!"

They all laughed together.

Then my mother spoke.

"Leonora," my mother said. "I cannot tell you how glad I am that you leave this ship to-morrow. You are really too perfect and lovely for a second wife to have about the premises. I think you've been doing a grand job, but if I never, never set eyes on you again it will be too soon. A woman can stand

just so much from a woman her husband is in love with—but only so much.”

Then they all laughed again.

“Remember, Kathleen, that the woman, too, has something to suffer,” said Leonora. “He’s older than in my day, but still very attractive, poor loon. Perhaps it’s as well I gave him a daughter who came back at the critical moment and saved us all from worse than death.”

“I don’t believe that,” my mother said, so cheekily.

“How wise you are, you silly,” said Leonora.

“Don’t mind me, girls,” my father said. “Just carry on. And don’t pay any regard to the fact that my son is in the audience.”

“Oh, the Lord Mayor,” said Leonora. “I knew this ship was going to be all right when he gave me the freedom of it.”

She clenched up her tiny hand with bones just under the white skin and made a tiny fist of it, and hit me a little tap under the chin and laughed at me with her lovely eyes and mouth—so that I could have cried for happiness about her.

The bar steward began to put on another record and suddenly the Captain came up and said to my mother: “I don’t dance much, no! If a Captain dances too much where is his ship? Oh, by Jove! There that is goodt. I talk slang and all in English. This is the last night, however, and always on the last night I have just the last one dance with my sweetheart of the voyage, though I have a wife in Terschelling. On the last night then it is safe to

dance. You don't dance a lot either, Mistress Copeland. But just perhaps one little dance with the old Hollander sailor who has brought you and your liddle ones all this way. One liddle dance."

My mother lit up bright as a small candle in a church back at Malta.

"I am honoured, Captain," she said.

My father said to Leonora: "The wife of my bosom has been wrenched from me by a foreign devil—a Van Tromp. Will you dance with me, O bird of paradise? And when I say bird I mean bird, for under it all I know you, O bird of paradise."

The chief engineer came up and said: "So now this is nice. The last dance. The music will play the 'Blue Danube.' That is goodt. I wish my Yackie was here. He doesn't dance any more than you do, Colin, but he would like to be here and so would I like it."

"So would I, Chief," I said, and I stood and watched them dance. The first officer looked down from the bridge, where he was on watch, but everybody was dancing so there would have been nothing for him to do to show how good he was socially. My mother was dancing with the Captain, and Leonora with my father who had been her husband, and Stevie with Joshua and Col. Bouverie with Mrs. Urquhart. The others were in bed or not there.

Round and round the dancers went to the tune of the "Blue Danube" and everyone danced their best, but no one so well, of course, as my father and Leonora. She was a great dancer, and though they

had not danced before on the *Dordrecht* they must have danced often before in the long and long ago.

The air was cool and clean and there was the little Southern Cross and the big moon, and the sea was sparkling.

So that was our last night aboard the motor vessel, or so it seemed, but, of course, it wasn't, for there is still to-night when we reach the Antipodes of Australia, and when I have put down what happened then I shall have finished the story.

CHAPTER XX

NOW the Captain was a very busy man just then as we neared Fremantle, but he knew in his funny Hollander way that this was an important time for us, and he paused just a moment and said: "So there it is—Australia! A very goodt country. All Hollanders know this. In old days it is funny to think that it was known as New Holland. 'Struth, yes. See, it is goodt that I talk Australian slang as goodt as my English. Well, now I must go, for the pilot is coming. There it is, where you all go to—Australia!"

We stood along the rail, all us passengers in the M.V. *Dordrecht*, and none of us had ever been there before to the Antipodes of Australia, excepting perhaps Leonora who had been everywhere. But my father had not been there, or any of us Copelands, although he had been in the navy in wartime and gone venturing everywhere.

When we left Hendon so long and long ago it was late autumn and raining and grey, as I have described, and it was hard to realize that now it was winter back there in England with all its slush and snow and discomforts and cold and not enough coal, but out here at the Antipodes of Australia it was summer. The late afternoon air was golden and kind, as if it was welcoming us, though, of course, it

wasn't. The weather does not know who is coming or anything like that, but it was nice to think so.

Yes, there we stood, even Ann, whom my brother Michael had carried up in his arms, with Mary Dolan to see everything was all right. Her leg looked funny in wooden splints with bandages wrapped whitely round.

I picked up Felicity who was just about ready to be put to bed, and my little funny sister Felicity and I looked at the Antipodes of Australia. There wasn't much to see, any more than there is anywhere when you are coming into a port from the sea—only low ground and houses and sheds and a concrete break-water sticking out like the claws of a crab as in Colombo. Still, it was a lovely golden afternoon, peaceful and kind. It was so golden that my father said: "A few hundred miles from here, up in the desert, they found the biggest nuggets of gold that have ever been found. They have names, but I have forgotten them. It is a very exciting country, Australia—I hope."

"Shall we find nuggets of gold?" Ann asked, which was silly. That was in the early days.

"Oh, yes," my mother said. "Hundreds, I suppose, if I know your father."

She and Leonora shared a quiet laugh, and my father said: "So long as you girls are happy, why should I worry? Though I've a lump in my throat big as an emu's egg."

"Darling, darling," my mother said. "Kick me."

"I never kick a lady unless she is sitting down," my father said.

"Oh, dear Kathleen, it takes me back. No jokes like the old jokes, eh, John?"

"Leonora," my father said sternly. "You are old enough to know that there are no new jokes."

I was still holding Felicity up, but I doubt if she could see the land. She lived in her own small new world still, and that was enough for her.

"Wow! Wow!" was all she kept on saying in a general sort of way. It seemed to me she was trying to make it sound different, because she is very intelligent for her age and I think she will be easily the best of the Copelands, perhaps better even than Rosemary who is so fair. Felicity will be dark but she has huge blue eyes and long black lashes.

Out came the pilot-boat to us, and we all said: "Ah, there's the pilot!" The sun was beginning to set, more beautifully than last night, but I shall not describe it. My mother took Felicity away off to bed. It was queer. Though she looked up through her lashes like a flirt, Felicity would not even kiss anyone, but when Leonora said to her, "Cherub!"—which was all she said—Felicity put out her little round head and kissed Leonora on the mouth.

"Leonora," my mother said, "you are my crucifix, but did you ever have a sweeter kiss?" She was very pleased that Felicity had done her stuff instead of being shy.

"Never in all my life," said Leonora, and you would have thought that her eyes were shiny with tears, but perhaps that was only because it was a nice thing to think.

They threw down the rope ladder with the wooden rungs and the rope for the pilot's bag. They do this always, though what the pilot carried in his little bag I do not know, though I have often wondered. Of course, he missed one of the rungs and slipped. I think pilots do this to make it seem harder. Every pilot we have had has done it, but none of them ever fell into the sea. Generally the pilot comes aboard and that is all, but this time after him came two other men. No one thought anything of that. They might have been customs' people or something. Passengers never know about such things.

The pilot came up from the lower deck and he had a lean face of leathery skin and a raincoat on, though it was hot.

"Aussie Number One," said my father. I hadn't thought of that. He looked young and hard and as if he didn't care for anyone. Though I only had a glimpse of him that was my impression and I thought he was all right.

The engine-room telegraph went ting-ting and the motor vessel panted again and the pilot launch went away.

Up the ladder from the lower deck came the other two men. The second one I do not remember at all, but the first was a big man with big feet and a big soft stomach. He was smoking a cigarette and the ash of the cigarette, and many others, lay like snow on the folds of his waistcoat where there was a gold chain with medals hanging on it, little shields and circles. He had on a funny felt hat pulled down over his left eye, and somehow he looked a cunning

man, though he hoisted himself up so slowly by the rails.

"Colonel Bouverie?" he said in an inquiring way, looking from one to the other with eyes as sharp and blue as a Hollander's.

Queer but Col. Bouverie was not there. Even queerer was that my father said, "Yes?"—as if answering a question with another.

"Come with me," said the man.

"Not until I know what you want," said my father.

Everyone was amazed, because the man wanted Col. Bouverie and not my father.

He had moved over to my father with surprising quickness, and the other man was at his elbow.

"Wouldn't it be better, Colonel," said the man nastily, "if we had this out in private?"

"No," my father said.

"Okay," the man said, moving the cigarette so that some more ash fell down on the folds of his waistcoat and his medals. "Have it your way." He spoke through his nose like a Cockney comedian on the B.B.C. "It's all one to me, baby. Okay. John Snee, alias Colonel Bouverie, etc., etc., I have here a warrant for your arrest on a charge of murdering Angela Parkhurst and Marion Ann Norman."

He went on saying the rest of his piece, which he knew by heart, and there were dates and places in it. He said how anything my father said, etc., but I didn't hear any more. My stomach was turning round and round. It was all so terrible and wrong. Of course,

my father wasn't Col. Bouverie but neither was Col. Bouverie. He was John Snee who had murdered two ladies.

A lot of things happened all at once, as they do.

Mrs. Urquhart fainted away, and, but for Joshua who caught her, would have fallen down on the deck and hurt herself. My sister, Rosemary, went across to a chair and sat on the end and took out her handkerchief and began to cry. My father said: "Holy smoke, I didn't know it was as serious as that. I'm not Bouverie. I was only fooling, because I was curious. I knew he was a crook—but murder——!"

"I ought to arrest you and maybe I will later," the man said. "Where is he?"

My father was quite upset.

"Down in his cabin I think—next deck—Number Four."

"He'd better be," the man said. "Come on, Fred."

The two big men went away so quickly that it was as if they had never been there, only my father was standing with his mouth open and Mrs. Urquhart was lying flat on the deck, and Rosemary was sobbing.

Just then my mother came up from putting Felicity to bed, which never took long. She was a very happy little baby, who tired herself out waddling about with her knickers coming down, and falling on her bottom. When it was bedtime she went straight to sleep with her dimpled arm over her nose. My mother was greatly surprised to find such a scene.

"I once said in jest," my father said, "that I would probably have to shoot him in the abdomen, but it was only joking. I never thought—— Thank your stars, my little black hen, for Leonora."

"Leonora again?" said my mother. "Must it always be Leonora? Oh, dear! But why is everyone fainting and sobbing and looking like ghosts?"

My father told her quick as could be.

Leonora was sitting on the end of the chair with her arm about Rosemary, and holding Rosemary's head on her shoulder.

"Golden top," she said in her quiet, even way. "I am not going to say I told you so, because I didn't. And I'd no idea the time would come so soon when you'd be glad a ballerina, poor sucker, took him away from you, or thought she did until the Urquhart cashed in with the big ready money. Poor Urquhart, she was really born to be murdered, come to think. But we won't think, will we, golden top? You weren't born to be murdered and neither was I, though about me there are some who think otherwise."

As Leonora said that she winked at my mother and father, which made their faces come back into being their faces again.

Then a lovely thing to see happened, for Rosemary lifted up her golden head and she smiled into Leonora's face, so close, they looked like the most beautiful pair of sisters there were anywhere.

"Leonora," Rosemary said: "Even then I didn't hate you, but now I love you. I'm only a kid, but

you know everything. I believe you had him taped all the time."

"Me?" Leonora said. "Didn't I tell you I was just a simple sucker?—and I didn't even get him, thank God."

She looked at my father over Rosemary's head saying, This is pretty good, eh? And it was.

"Oh, you're the loveliest creature in the whole wide world," said Rosemary. "After my mother—the loveliest."

Now we three who were listening, and knew, stiffened at that and a kind of shiver went through us.

"Leonora!" my mother cried out, pleadingly, wanting her now to tell.

But Leonora didn't seem to hear.

"Child," she said, "you're so right. After your mother, I am the very loveliest person in the whole, wide world. Think of me sometimes like that. And now, let me tell you, you look a sight, and you need to wash your face in cold water and powder your nose before you arrive in Australia where, for all we know, there may be a man waiting to meet you. So run now and wash your face and powder your nose, like a good girl."

Rosemary said again, "Darling!" and kissed Leonora, which was lovely to see and think what it meant. To Leonora it was an even finer kiss than Felicity's. You could tell that. Then Rosemary ran off to do as she was told, because we were very near Australia now.

Everybody else was gathered round poor Mrs. Urquhart, who had nearly married a murderer, but

we four drew together quietly as if we were old friends who had known each other for years—and so we were. Even me in a way.

“Leonora, witch,” my mother said, so fondly. “This is the crowning blow. You’ve been warned. I simply won’t endure any more of your perfection. I loathe perfection. You’re too good to be true.”

“I never was,” smiled Leonora. “Dear, dear Kathleen, I never was. Never true. Ask John.”

“Don’t mind daddy,” my father said. “Shoot the works, girls.”

They didn’t heed my father.

“It’s gone beyond wisecracks, Leonora,” my mother said. “It’s gone beyond sense, come to that. Listen, lovely, you’ve got to tell Michael and Rosemary. God help me, I wouldn’t want to stop you.”

Leonora was as I have described her and as a ballerina would be, but suddenly she turned herself into an Empress, as she must have seemed to the submariner at Colombo.

“Kathleen, dear wise one,” she said. “I hate you as much as you hate me and I love you more. It’s all very simple. The last thing in the world I want is a grown-up daughter and son. You, my worst enemy, will admit I am the personification of youth. My job is my life, and I should hate to be cluttered up by dear Michael or golden Rosemary. They are your’s. You made them far more than I did, and I congratulate you. I have nothing to give them as good as you have.” She suddenly pretended to

fan herself with her little hand with little bones showing in it. "Oh, dear, what a long speech!" she said.

"And so—?" my mother said.

"I must tear those rosy spectacles from your eyes," Leonora said. "I really am as John knows me to be. Not as you think you see me through his eyes. Kathleen, I haven't a single maternal instinct in me. I am quite a horror in my own lovely way. If you will keep on rearing those two I shall be ever in your debt, and go out into the night. If you like, you can have paper snow flung down on me from the flies, because this is all acting. All, all acting. When my poor old legs give out I shall become a great actress, won't I, John?"

"You always were, worse luck," my father said.

"You think I've been wise and perfect and good—yes, even you, Kathleen, and including the Lord Mayor," Leonora ended. "But it's so easy when you have everything, as I have, and you haven't seen what I mean yet, but you will. You will at Fremantle the moment we dock. And now I must go and make myself beautiful. You just wait and see and you'll understand. Ah!"

Forgetting all the Copelands, Leonora looked for a moment out into the sunset and was in another world. She didn't even glance at the Copelands any more, but went down to make herself beautiful, as if she was not beautiful enough.

"Well, my tiger, tiger, burning bright," my father said to my little mother, "whatever it was we've had it."

"Yes, John," my mother simply said. "We've had it."

By this time the others had got Mrs. Urquhart round and were giving her brandy.

"Oh! Oh!" she was saying. "What a fool I was! That's the trouble with believing in astrology and numbers if you don't check things, and you never do. Oh, I've been imposed on. I might have been dead by this time next week."

"Ay, lass," said Joshua, putting it on. "By goom, wealthy widows should be wary. Though mind you, Mrs. Urquhart, he'd have needed a girt big hearth-stone to bury you under."

"Josh," said Stevie, "if she were capable of hearing I'd have your tongue out. But as she isn't, I need a drink."

"We all do," said Joshua, so happily and not thinking of throwing wine glasses overboard or anything like that. "Ay, we do. It's worked out champeen."

"Oh, I never want to set eyes on him again," Mrs. Urquhart cried out. "The wicked evil man!"

And that is what Col. Bouverie turned out to be, which was a great surprise and shock and disappointment to me—I think the greatest I have ever had. I have played some tricks on my readers in the past but this is too serious. I am going to put it all down very quickly and be done with it. It is an awful subject which I would rather be done with and forget about.

Col. Bouverie—I cannot call him anything else even now—was indeed a wicked man. He had murdered those two ladies for their money, but their

bodies were found nastily after he had fled from England. He was never in the Commandos at all, or even in the army, though how such a fine man managed that in wartime I do not know. Perhaps he was a Commando who just went wrong, and all he made up would have been real if things had been different. I don't really think that, I'm afraid, though it would be comforting to do so, after thinking such a lot of Col. Bouverie.

At least, in the end, he wasn't hanged. The two men never found him. He had jumped over the side and been drowned before we got to Fremantle. We read afterwards in the paper that his body had been washed ashore. I am glad he did it, rather than being taken to the scaffold with the chaplain and all. In spite of everything he seemed to me to be a very gallant man, though I must admit I am glad he did not marry Rosemary, let alone Leonora.

By this time it was nearly dark and the motor vessel was tied up to the wharf at Fremantle. Down below the chief engineer had pulled down the handle, and the *Dordrecht* did not have to pant-pant along any more, or not for a while. She could rest. She was a very fine motor vessel, and we had all grown very fond of her, especially me, because I knew more about her than any of the other passengers, having studied her with the chief engineer and the second officer who sat at our table, and the boatswain.

The gangway went down and up came the shore people, rushing on board as usual. It was funny to think that this time they were Australians from

Australia just down on the wharf, whilst we had come all the way from Hendon on the top side of the world.

"Pressmen to interview Leonora Brown," my father said. "Yet if they only knew it, we are better copy."

"Better than Leonora, silly?" my mother said.

"Oh, yes," my father said. "She is the past, poor dying swan, but we, my lamb, are the future."

Listening to this, I thought that my father was a great and good and wise man, which is what I have been trying to explain all along.

My mother put her arm round him as far as it would go and said: "Darling!" Then she went on and said: "Oh, look!—you call my Felicity Comical Chris, but there's Comical Chris himself. Is he an Australian newspaper man?"

"I shouldn't think so," said my father smiling, and if all the others were he was right. The others all had on very funny felt hats and most ordinary clothes and their faces were leathery. This one had a pink face and a little plump body and a small waxed moustache and tiny hands and tiny feet in shiny boots with buttons in their cloth tops. He wore a brown bowler hat and a brown suit, and in his buttonhole was a strange flower which could only have been an orchid. He looked like a funny man on the stage, but when he got close you saw he had the most lovely, swimmy, brown eyes like a seal's. He had a big mouth which was quivering with excitement and you could feel a kind of fire as he burst up on to the deck, so that all the lean Australians, in

some strange way, did not seem to matter, though they paid no heed to him but tried to jostle him aside and said: "Where is she?"

"There she is!" they barked, and my father smiled as if all this had happened before and was just funny. But suddenly his smile vanished.

Leonora had come out on deck and she had made herself beautiful. She had not put on anything special or anything you would notice, for everything was just right and it was as if she had always worn it. But she took your breath quite away.

She didn't see us Copelands, or any of the other passengers in the *Dordrecht*, and she did not see the men from the papers at all but only the little man in the brown suit and the brown hat.

She was all in white. Her little feet did not touch the deck as she flew across it—oh, faster than any white seagull.

"Love!" she cried out, and I had never guessed before that Leonora's voice of all people's could catch on fire.

For her there was nobody there but him. She flew into his outstretched arms like a white gull to its nest, and everyone just stared because it was most moving and in a strange way. I mean to see her in his arms like that, and know for Leonora there wasn't anything else but the funny little man in the brown suit and the brown hat with buttons on his boots and his huge brown seal eyes. Everyone was quiet, even the people from the newspapers who looked very hard boiled. It was like being in church.

Then a man held up a camera and a light went off

with a huge white flare above, and then he said: "Now one facing the camera, please. Look this way. Our picture page goes to press early. Hoi, madame, could we have another of you with your husband if you'd be so kind?"

Everyone laughed at that and Leonora came quickly back to earth from heaven, and turned about and stood with her husband. Suddenly there was a huge bunch of flowers in her arm, though where they had come from I do not know. And the bright light came again and then Leonora looked at my father and mother with her arm through his, and she looked in such a knowing and proud way that it was as if she had spoken aloud and said, "So now you have seen him you understand why I don't care a fig for anybody else in the world!"

She meant Mr. Brown, whom we had all always forgotten, in his brown hat and suit.

"Oh, mother," said my father, and he never called my mother that in the ordinary way, "am I dismayed? This is the crowning humiliation, the bowl of hemlock. I think you can count me as cured."

"If he'd only been a film star or a Greek god," my mother said. "Oh, how I detest the adorable vision. She's going out of our lives, John, I know, because I trust her implicitly, alas!—but if ever I see you looking far away and dreamy, don't worry, I shall know."

"You will know, my little black hen," my father said, "if you have any sense, that I am thinking of Mr. Brown and despising myself. Come, my passion fruit, I need a drink even at shore prices, which, I

fancy, is what we'll have to pay." Then he turned to me as he said: "Well, son of my loins, what do you think of it all?"

"I don't really know, father," I told him. "But, oh, in spite of everything, it has been fun aboard the motor vessel and I'm glad you brought us."

"Yes, John," my mother said. "I think that sums it up. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings——!"

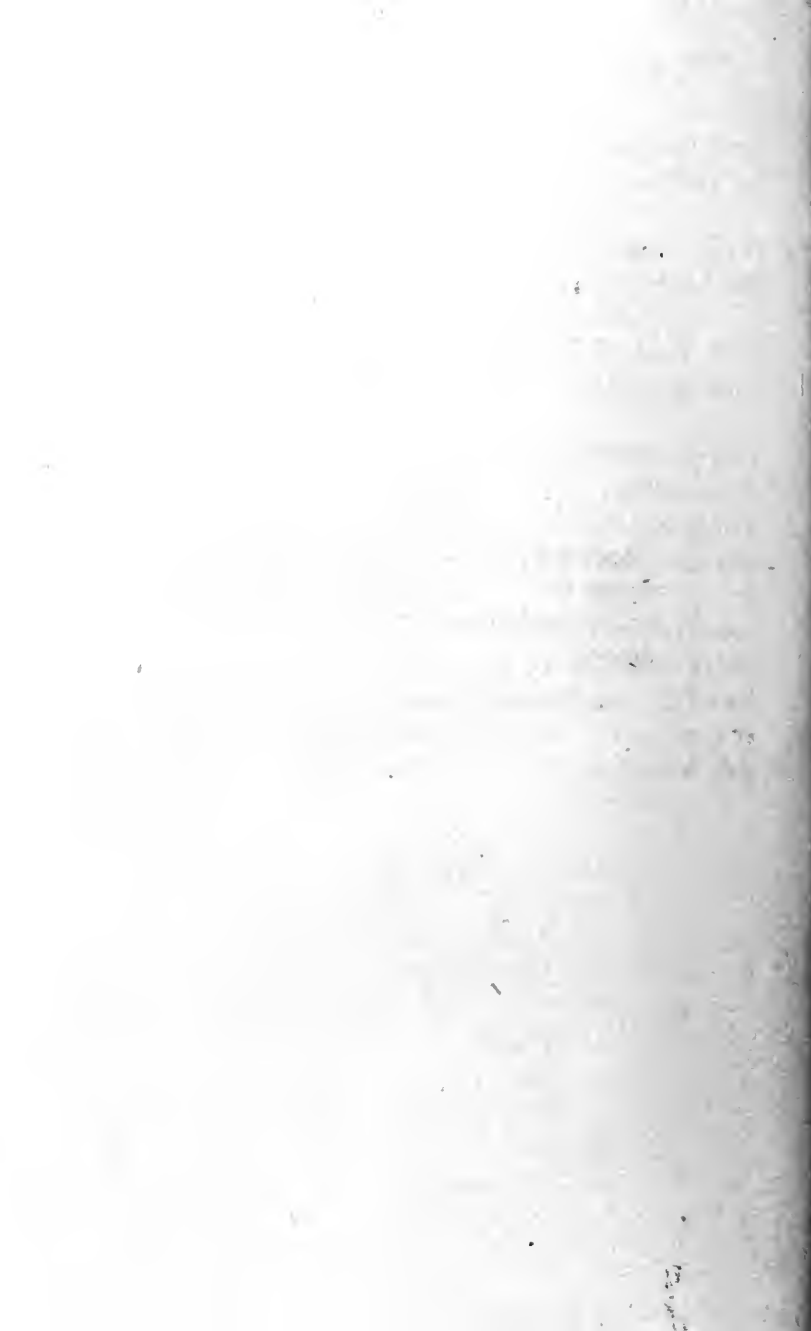
So we went into the smoke-room, and all the others came in except Leonora who was being interviewed, and Col. Bouverie who was dead, though we didn't know then, and Felicity who was in her bunk, and the Hollanders who were busy.

Now there it was. We had come all the way from Hendon, on that wet night when we had a car right to the docks, to the Antipodes of Australia. We had a bit further to go but our voyage was at an end as we had all felt. So I shall write at the end of this story:

THE END

NOTE

Apparently in the excitement of the voyage Colin Copeland didn't find time for the ambitious factual appendices he planned.



BOOKS BY DALE COLLINS

Winds of Chance

Ah, Promised Land!

Far Off Strands

Utility Baby

A Sister for Susan

Bright Vista

Seatracks of the Speejacks

Ordeal

The Haven

The Sentimentalists

Vanity Under the Sun

Idolaters

The Fifth Victim

Rich and Strange

Jungle Maid

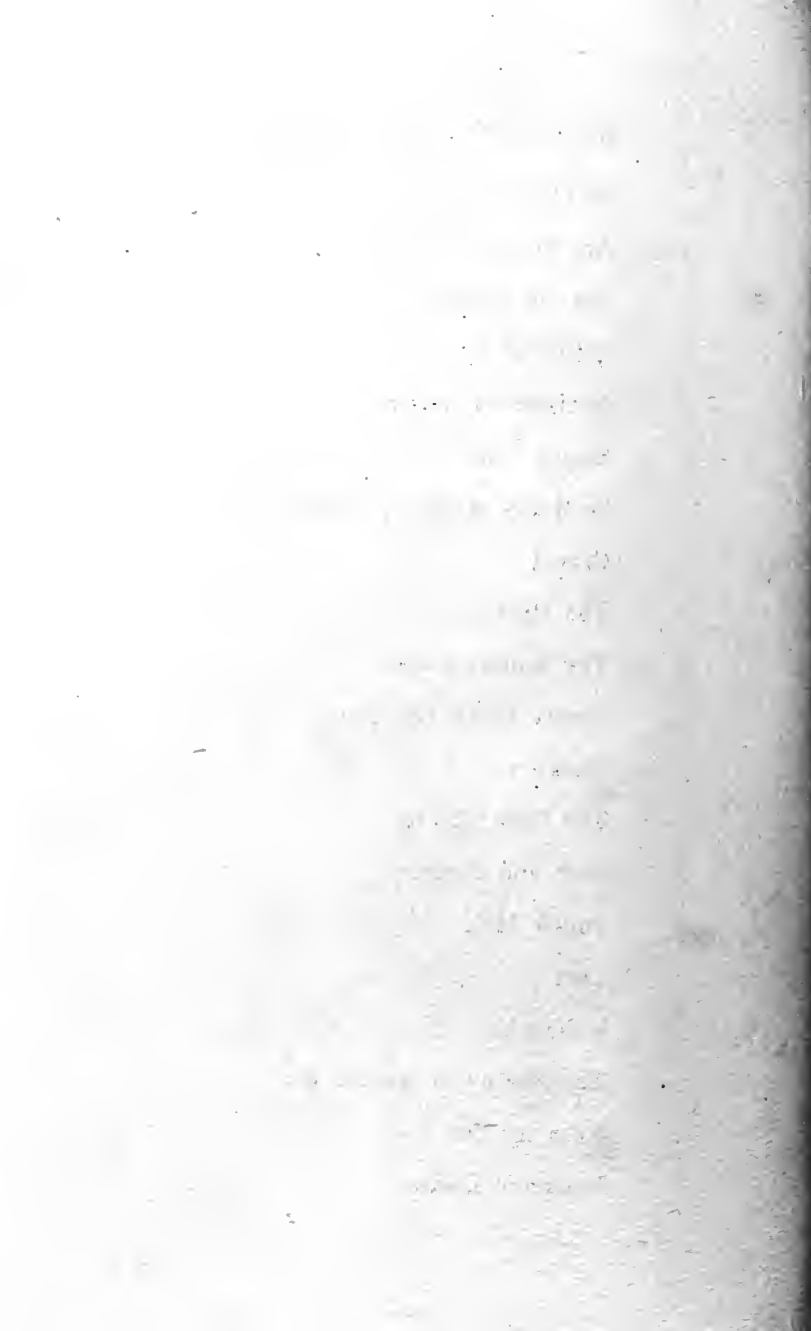
Lost

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